THE

Banjo Players' Hand Book

AND

COMPLETE INSTRUCTOR,

BY

S. S. STEWART.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.:

Published by S. S. STEWART, Manufacturer of Fine Banjos.

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"PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT."—"KNOWLEDGE IS THE GUIDE OF PRACTICE."

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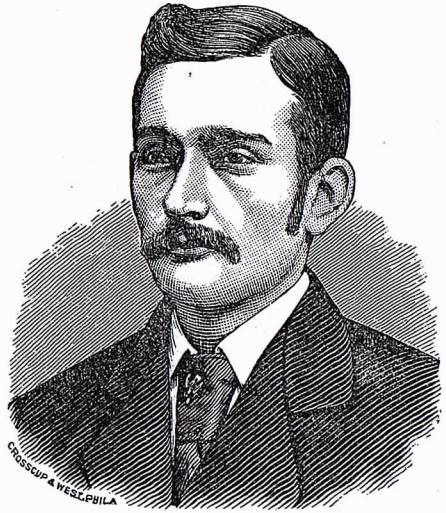
AND

COMPLETE INSTRUCTOR.



BY S. S. STEWART.

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THE BANJO.

The modern Banjo is purely an American Instrument, although the idea of its conception is said by some to have been Egyptian.

The Instrument has been associated with negro minstrelsy for some years past, and for that reason, many persons still ignore it as a musical instrument.

Of late years many practical improvements have been made, and the Improved Banjo of the present day, is not the Banjo of years ago.

To-day, the Instrument, in the hands of a master, can be made to produce music most beautiful. It is also a splendid accompaniment to the voice, but its great powers as a solo instrument are manifest, and are being rapidly developed.

The greatest draw back to its more rapid advance has been the lack of competent teachers and manufacturers; many so-called Banjo makers and teachers, possessing no knowledge of music whatever. But this day is drawing to a close and a brighter future is in store. The Banjo must, and will, take its proper place. That this little work may assist in elevating the instrument, is the aim and desire of the author.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BANJO.

In order to construct a fine toned Instrument, it is absolutely necessary to have the right materials and appliances. And even with these, let the maker be ever so good a mechanic—without music alability and a cultivated ear, it is next to impossible to construct an instrument that will be satisfactory in every point. There are many persons, who having capital to invest, think they can construct *Banjos*, but it is as difficult to construct from a model, a

perfect toned Banjo, as it is to copy the frame of a Violin and produce the same sweet tones.

A little reflection will convince any one of this fact.

The average size of Rim of the modern Banjo is eleven inches in diameter, for the parlor instrument, and twelve inches for the concert instrument. The depth of the rim varies with different manufacturers from less than two inches to two and one-half. A narrow rim, however, makes a much neater looking instrument. The very best rims are of maple, covered with German Silver or other metal. The metal should be fitted tightly around the wooden rim and turned, or spun, over a wire on the edge. The head being brought down over a round edge gives the instrument a much clearer and more beautiful tone than if allowed to press immediately upon the flat surface of the wood. The outside hoop, or band, for holding down the head, should be of heavy metal, so that the side screws, or hooks, may be set into it; otherwise they are liable to tear or cut the head.

The neck, or staff, of the Banjo should be constructed from the best seasoned wood that can be procured. The woods in most general use are Walnut, Maple and Mahogany. Walnut is most generally used, but great care should be taken in selecting it, in order to avoid future warping or springing. Hard woods, and also fancy woods, such as Ebony, Rosewood, etc., are sometimes used for necks, but although such woods make very handsome appearing necks, they are the least desirable, and will not aid in producing fine toned Instruments. The author has never yet seen an instrument having a neck or rim of hard wood that was perfect in tone. The harder and more dense the wood, the weaker and less brilliant the tone.

Such instruments may answer very well for the use of amateurs, but where a powerful tone is desired, they will not meet the requirements.

The proper length of the neck for an eleven inch rim Banjo is from nineteen to twenty inches, from the nut to rim; and for a twelve inch rim, from twenty to twenty-one and one-half inches. The longer the distance from the nut to the bridge the better the vibration and the greater the power of tone. Hence a long neck is always preferable to a short one.

The number of "brackets" upon an instrument is a matter of taste—but it is desirable to have enough to give

the instrument a handsome appearance and to hold the head down evenly. As to the head or skin, experience only will assist in selecting and adapting it to the instrument. The first thing however to be thought of is quality and strength. Color is but second consideration. Some prefer heads all transparent, while others prefer them all white. Professional players, as a class, will only tolerate white heads.

Heads may, however, be made white by artificial processes, but such heads are never as durable as those that have not been tampered with.

THE PRESERVATION OF THE BANJO.

The Banjo is a sensitive instrument and should not be kept in a hot, or very damp, room. Always avoid keeping the instrument in a closet next to a hot chimney, if you wish to save the head.

After using the instrument, the strings should be wiped off, removing the dampness or perspiration from the hands; and the rim, or body, should be covered with a silk handkerchief, after which place the Instrument in a suitable bag or box.

The Bridge should also be removed. The head should always be tight, and when the wrench is used, it should be used evenly all round—for if the head is drawn tighter on one side than another the rim will be drawn out of shape. This is often the cause of apparent warping or springing of rims.

THE REPAIR OF THE BANJO.

The Banjo if properly constructed is not liable to often get out of repair, unless very carelessly used or roughly handled. The only thing about it that is liable to give out is the head, and every performer should endeavor to acquire the art of re-heading his own Banjo. To do this well requires some experience—as many a good instru-

ment may be made to sound very badly by having a poor head, or one that is not properly put on.

Select a good tough skin that is large enough and after having removed all the hooks, and hoop, from the rim, (it is also better to remove the neck when practicable), roll the head in a wet towel until it becomes saturated with dampness and is pliable—this will only require a few minutes. Then gently stretch the head all round with the fingers and lay it over the rim, putting on the flesh hoop. Then pull the head even and put on the hoop, or band, tucking the edge of the head up under it, and putting on a hook to hold it in its place. Go all round the rim, tucking in the head, until you have enough hooks on to hold it. Then take a pair of plyers and pull the edges of the head tight—going all round the rim. After which put on the remainder of the hooks. The head should be so put on that the hoop will remain about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch above the level, until the head becomes dry. Then trim off the superfluous head even with the top edge of the hoop. It should be allowed to stand for at least twenty-four hours before being drawn down—and if the weather is damp it had better stand, still longer. It is, however, always best to take advantage of a clear day for this work, when possible.

To remove dirt, burnt cork, etc., from the head, do not wash it, but use an ordinary gum pencil eraser, in the same manner that you would erase pencil marks from paper.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE BANJO.

Scarcely any entirely *new* instrument, of any description, will sound perfectly well.

The author has had Banjos of his manufacture that when first completed, although perfectly constructed, sounded poorly; when by a course of practice upon them for some weeks they have developed into very fine toned instruments. Every one knows that a new Violin, be it ever so finely made, has a harsh tone at first, and needs a great deal of developing before it can become fit for a solo instrument. Many have labored for years, and spent

fortunes, in the vain endeavor to discover the secret of the tone of the old Cremona Violins. It is by some, considered a lost art. Let a man be ever so good a mechanic and ever so skilful a copyist, he may copy the old Violins until he is tired and yet not produce any thing like the tone of the original. There is something there that cannot be copied—perhaps it may be the influence of the maker, still living in his work.

STRINGING THE BANJO.

The Banjo should be strung much finer than the Guitar or Violin. For the first and fifth strings use only those that are prepared for the Instrument. The second string should be a fine Violin E, and the third string should be a heavy Violin E, or a light A. The fourth, or silver string, should be one that is made especially for the instrument. Guitar D strings are used by some, but they are too heavy.

"FRETS" ON THE BANJO.

It is almost impossible for a learner to acquire a knowledge of the fingerboard, without guides of some kind, to locate the positions. Narrow strips of wood, inlaid level with the fingerboard, at the proper distances apart, are in common use—and for convenience sake they are called frets; but the true fret is raised above the surface of the fingerboard. Some performers prefer raised frets, and some merely guides, or inlaid frets.

On the subject of raised frets, Gardiner says,—("Music of Nature," page 202):—

"The frets upon a Viol were narrow strips of wood, just raised above the fingerboard, crossing it at right angles, and were so placed, that the finger casually falling between the frets, the string was stopped in tune. In the Guitar they still remain as a guide to ignorance, and an impediment to taste and expression."

Each fret, or guide, on the Banjo represents one semitone, not a full tone, as many beginners suppose. Therefore to *sharp* a note, stop it one fret nearer the rim. To *flat* a note, stop it one fret nearer the nut.

OF THE FINGERS USED IN PLAYING, AND MANNER OF FINGERING.

All the fingers of the left hand are used in stopping the strings—but never the thumb. Some use the thumb for stopping the fourth string, but this is a very clumsy and un-artistic manner of handling the instrument.

The first three fingers of the right hand, and also the thumb, are used in manipulating the strings. The little finger should rest on the head, near the bridge, to support the hand.

In the old style of playing, by *striking* the strings, the first finger and thumb, only are used. The first finger, in most cases being covered by a "thimble," not so much as a protective to the nail, as a hammer to produce a greater amount of noise. I say noise instead of sound. Noise is not sound. The former is a confused *mixture* of sounds, whereas the latter is a pure harmonious effect. The old style of "striking," or "thumping," is rapidly passing out of date, and is now mostly used in playing Military Marches, etc.

All beginners on the Banjo will find that their fingers at first become sore, but after some practice the ends of the fingers become hardened, so that the friction of the strings is not felt.

The nails should be kept pared rather close, and the ends of the fingers, rather than the nails, should touch the strings.

The Banjo Bridge varies in size to suit the fingers of the performer, but a rather small bridge is in most cases preferable. The size and style of bridge adopted by the author has been found suitable in nearly all cases.

THE MOST SUITABLE KEYS FOR PLAYING.

The Banjo may be played in any Key, though like other stringed instruments, it has its favorites. Owing to its peculiar construction, and the length of neck, it is very difficult to play accompaniments or chords in some of the

keys. On the piano or organ, where you have all the notes in regular order, and have but to strike or press them, it is a comparatively easy matter to play in all keys. But on the Banjo, where you have first to *make* the note before striking it, it becomes a matter of more difficulty. Thus many persons, who have not sufficient perseverance to study and practice, have settled down to the conclusion that the instrument could only be played in the Keys of A, E, and D major, and their relative minor keys, of F sharp, C sharp and B. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," but the banjoist of the present day will find that it is necessary for his success, if he wishes to excel, to play in other keys than the foregoing named. For song accompaniments, the keys named may be all that is necessary, but not so for instrumental pieces. By practicing the chromatic scale, as laid out in this work, the learner will overcome many difficulties and learn to properly locate the notes and read them at sight.

Nothing worth possessing is acquired without labor. Knowledge must be sought after and toiled for. Ask any of the famous Violin soloists how they acquired their ability and success—they will tell you by incessant practice, hard study, and continued perseverance.

Many persons upon hearing the Banjo properly performed upon, are seized with a desire to learn to play; but after taking a few lessons, and finding they can not master it in a few days, become discouraged and give it up—when by a little perseverance they might become good performers. "Practice makes perfect," but without practice no amount of teaching will be of any benefit.

THE CORRECT PITCH FOR TUNING THE BANJO.

It is impossible to designate the pitch to which any Banjo should be tuned, owing to the various sizes of instruments and different lengths of necks adopted by different manufacturers. In tuning the instrument, it is proper to begin with the fourth, or silver string, and after having tuned it to the desired pitch, then tune the other strings to correspond. A Banjo having a short neck should be tuned to a higher pitch than one having a longer neck.

For public playing, especially fine instrumental pieces, where the performer uses an instrument of concert size, the following will be found the most desirable pitch for tuning: Tune the fourth string to B flat, a semi-tone above the reading pitch. If you are accompanied by piano or orchestra, the accompaniment must be written a semi-tone above your own music. This is the method adopted by the author, and, in common use among professional players.

"POSITION" AND "BARRE."

Each fret on the Banjo may be termed a position. The hand is said to be in the first position when it is next to the nut, or so that the first finger will fall upon the first fret. The position that a chord is in is determined by the fret that the first finger is on.

The term Barre, or Bar, should not be confounded with position. To make a barre the first finger is placed across the fingerboard so as to cover two or more strings. The finger, in making a barre, bears the same relation to the strings that the nut does at the first position.

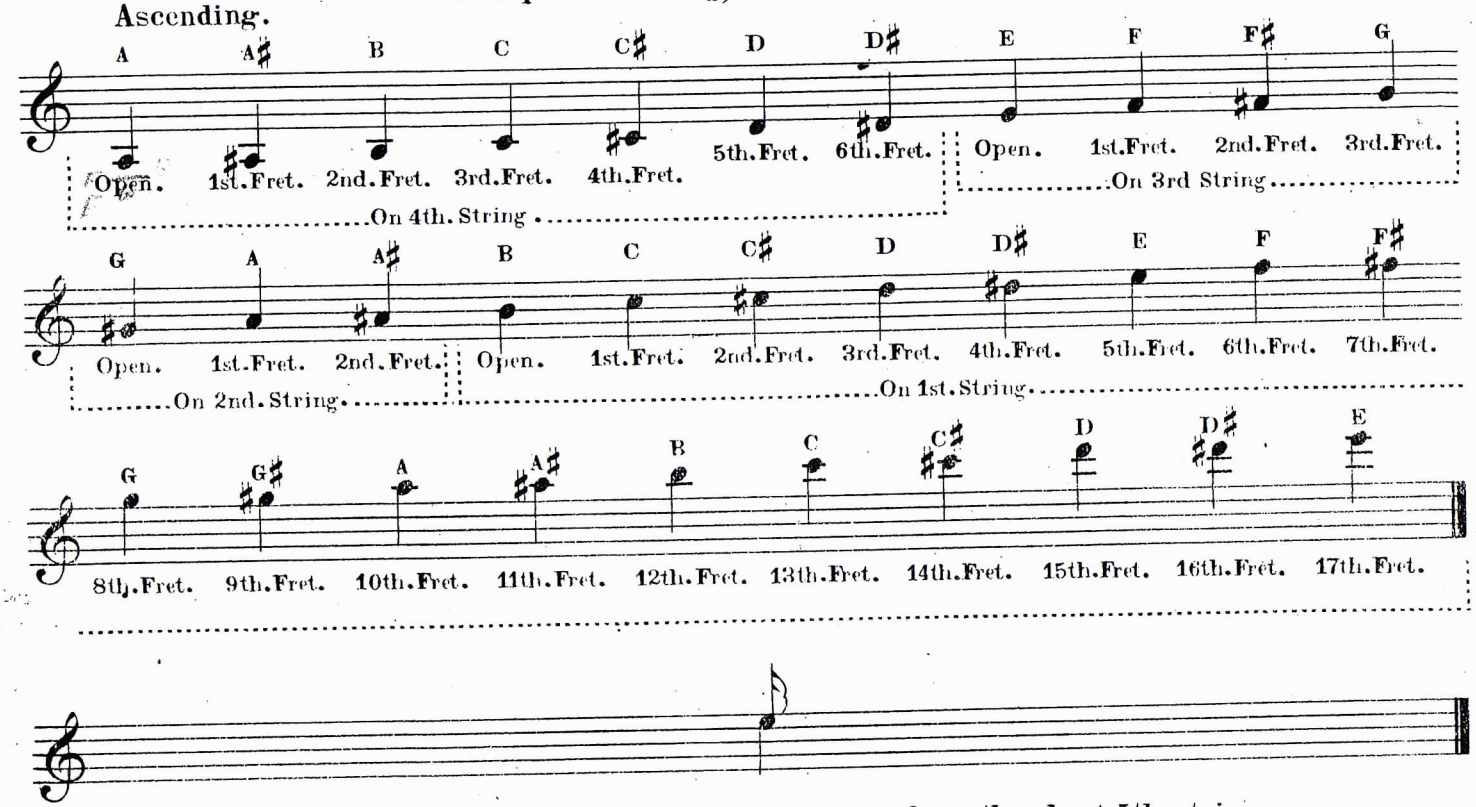
RUDIMENTS OF MUSIC.

As there are hundreds of instruction books before the public containing the rudiments of music, the author has not deemed it advisable to embrace them in this work; at the same time deeming it quite useless to attempt any instruction upon Time, etc.

Without a practical knowledge of the latter it is impossible to perform any piece correctly. To obtain a knowledge of time it is necessary to have personal instruction. Although nearly every music instruction book ever published contains instruction upon this subject, the author has never yet met with any person who had acquired proficiency through the studying of books. As every city and town, and almost every village, contains a teacher of music, it is advisable for the student to take regular lessons in the rudiments. In doing so he will master the Banjo much more rapidly and with much greater ease, and in time reach proficiency.

CHROMATIC SCALE FOR THE BANJO.

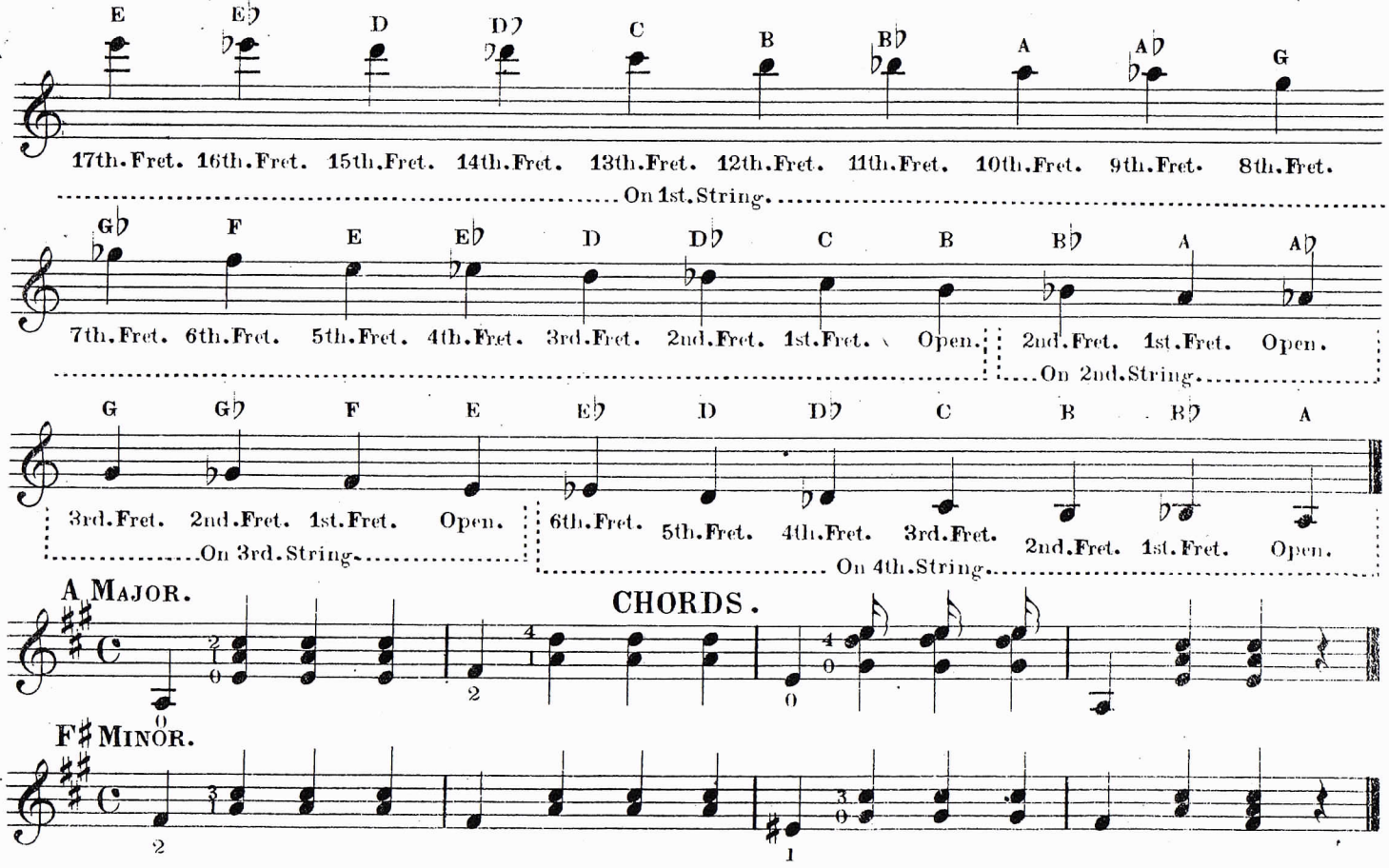
Sharps Ascending, Flats Descending.



When the E has a double stem, like example - it is to be made on the short 5th. string.

12 Descending.

CHROMATIC SCALE.

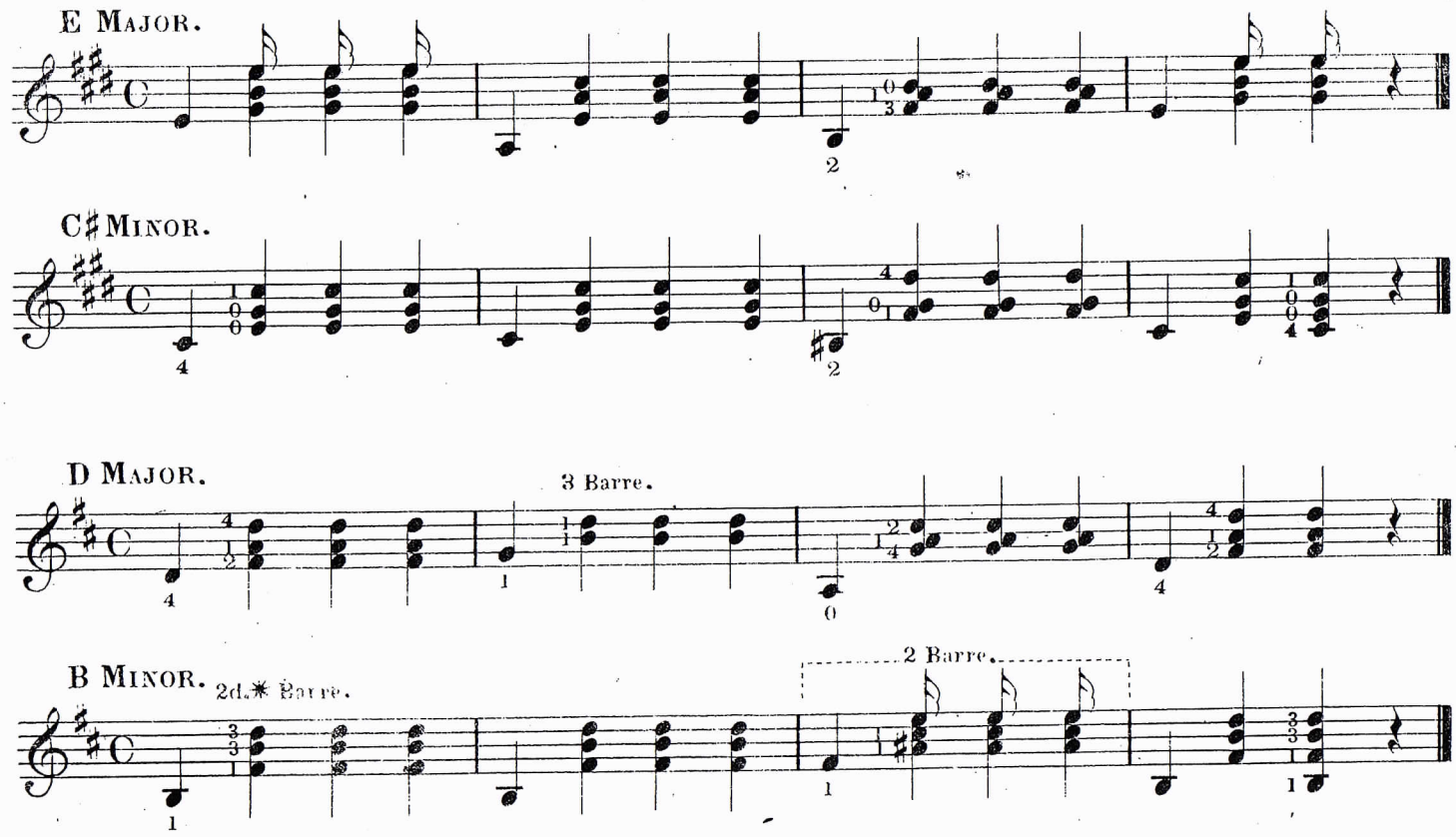


CHORDS.

A MAJOR.

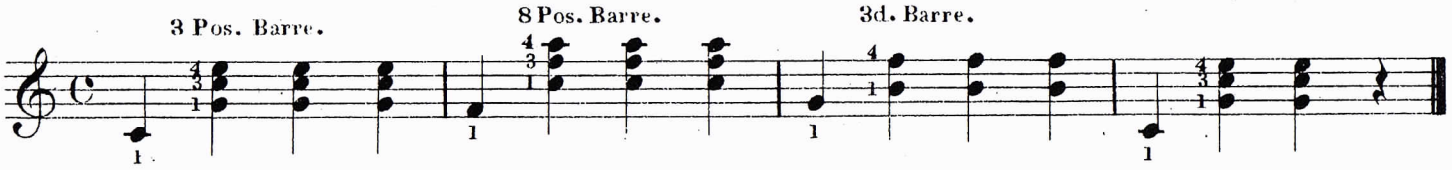
F♯ MINOR.

CHORDS. Continued.

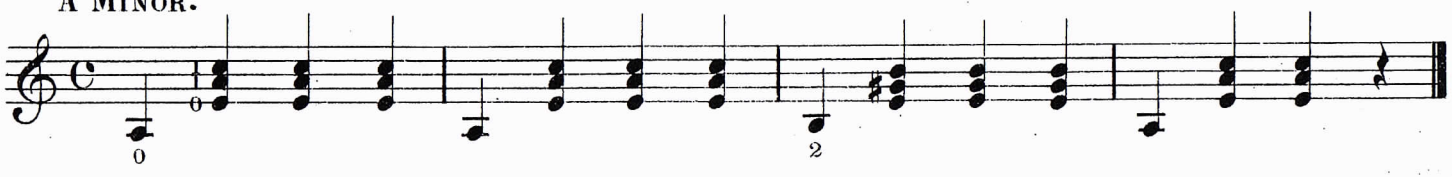


CHORDS. Continued.

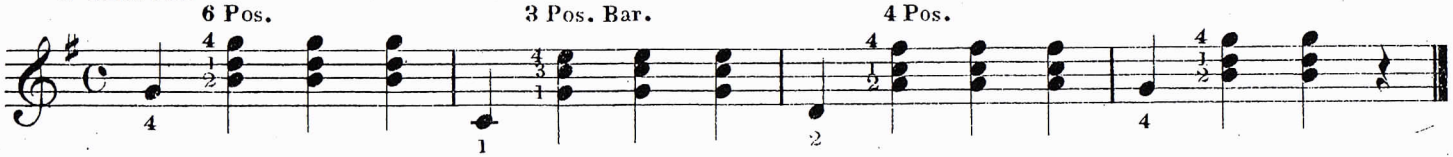
C Major.



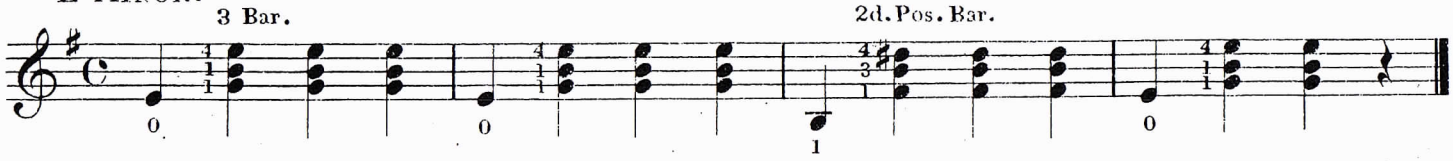
A Minor.



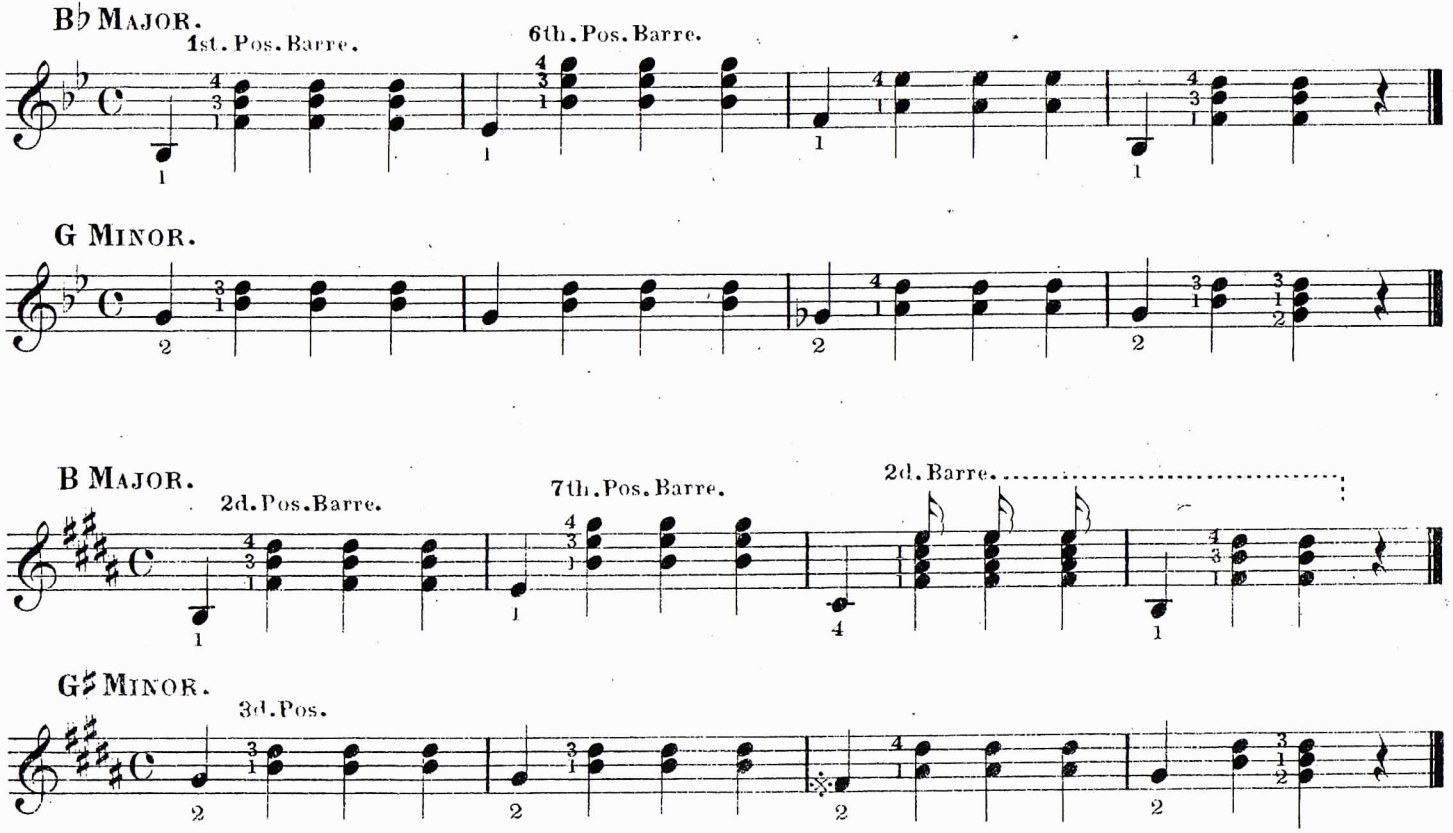
G Major.



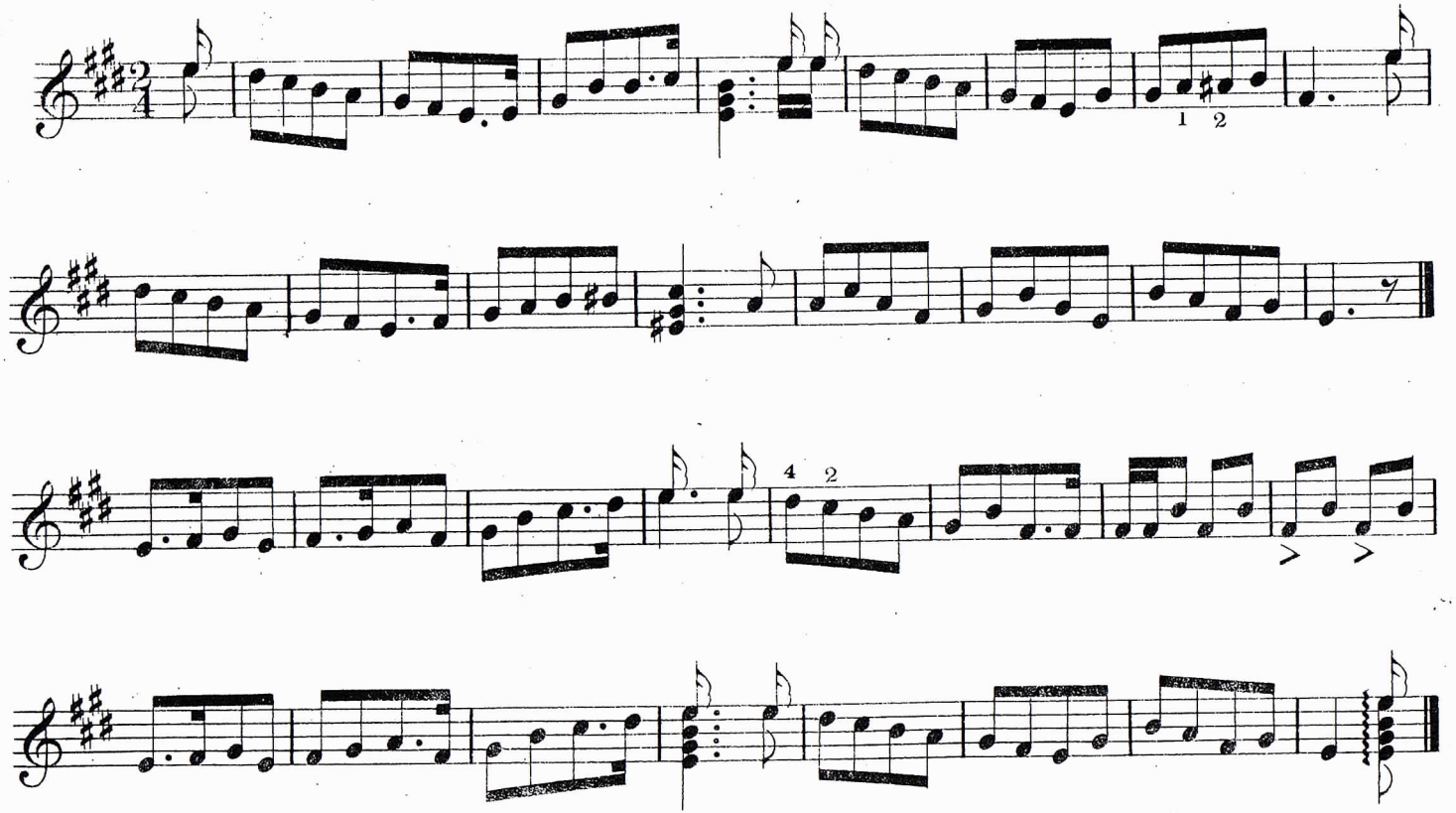
E Minor.



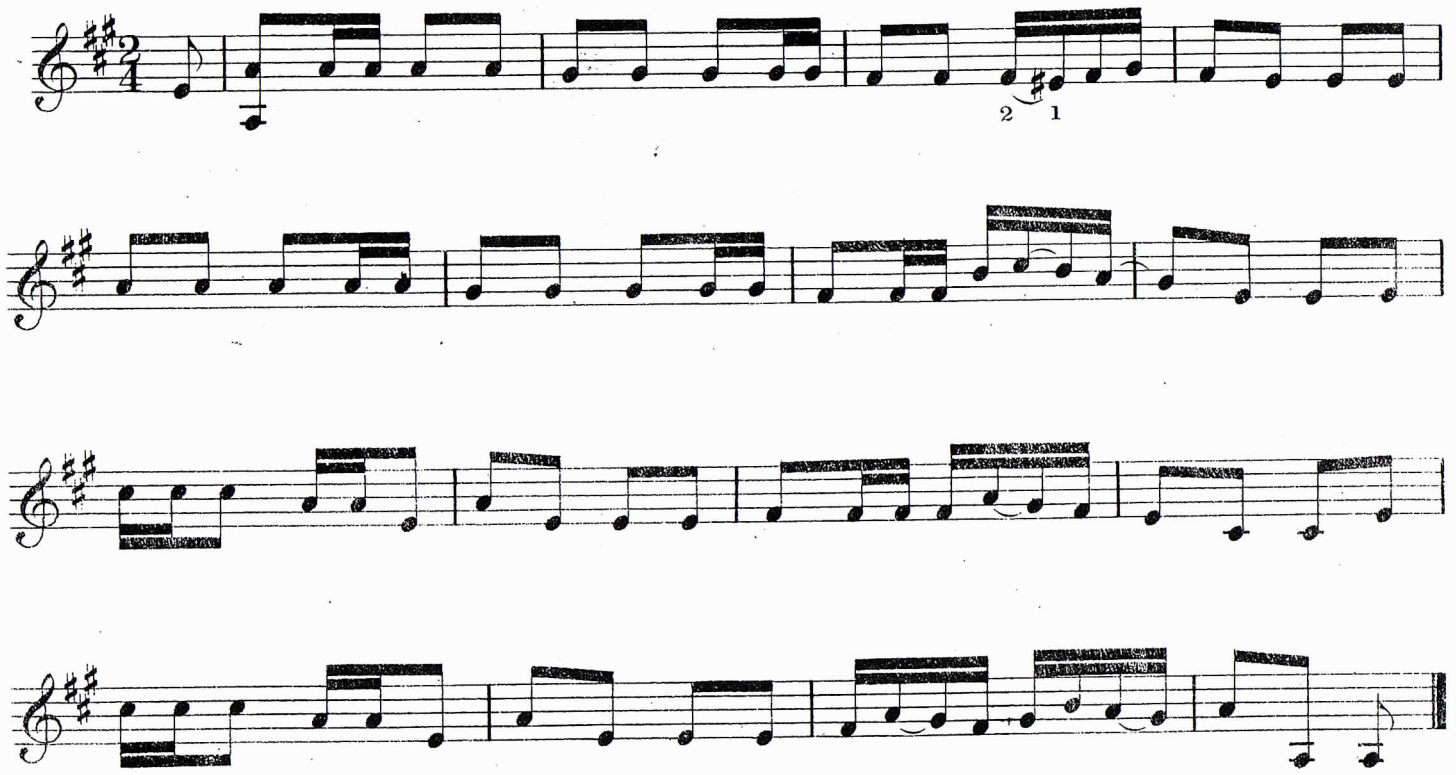
CHORDS. Concluded.



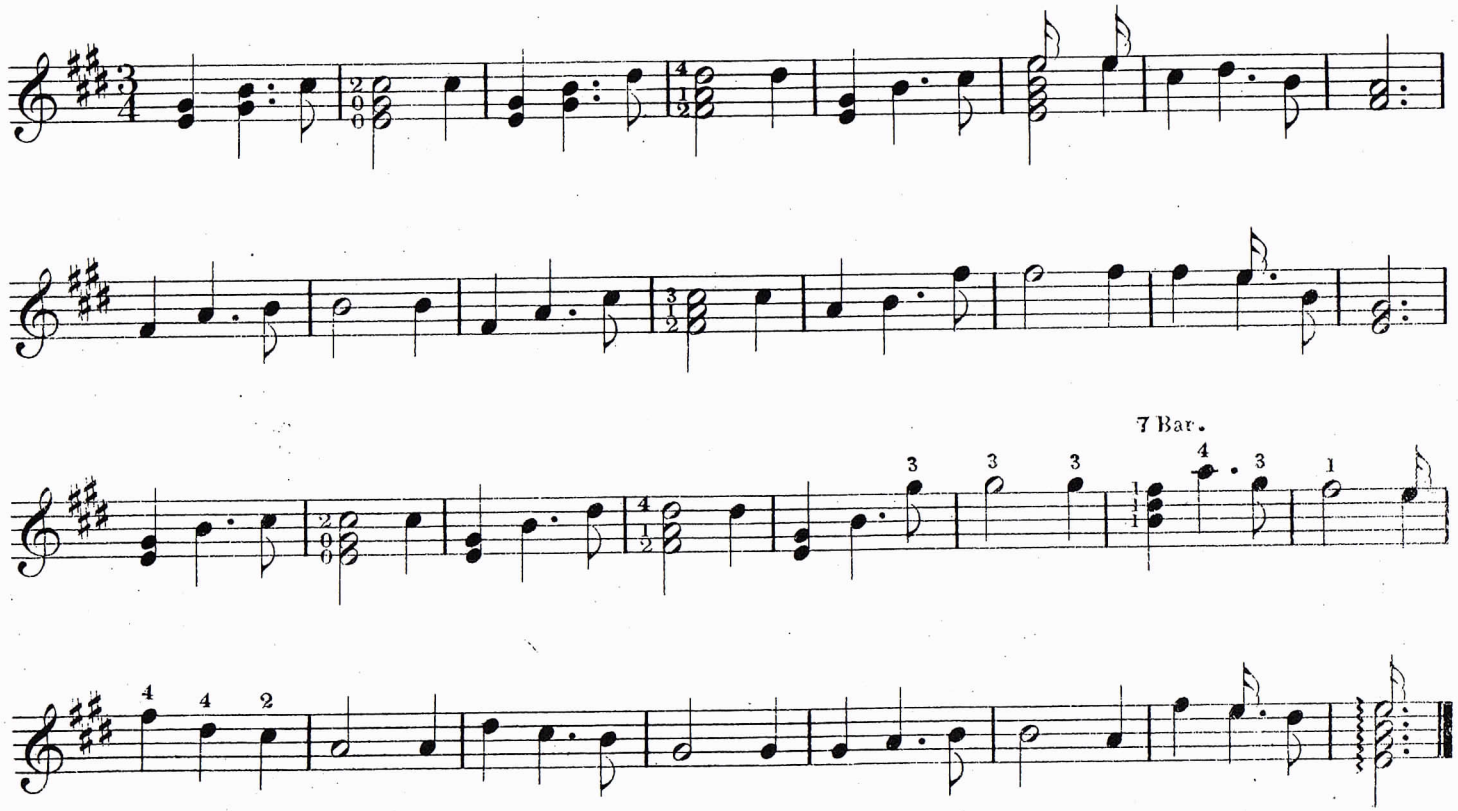
JOHNNY MORGAN.



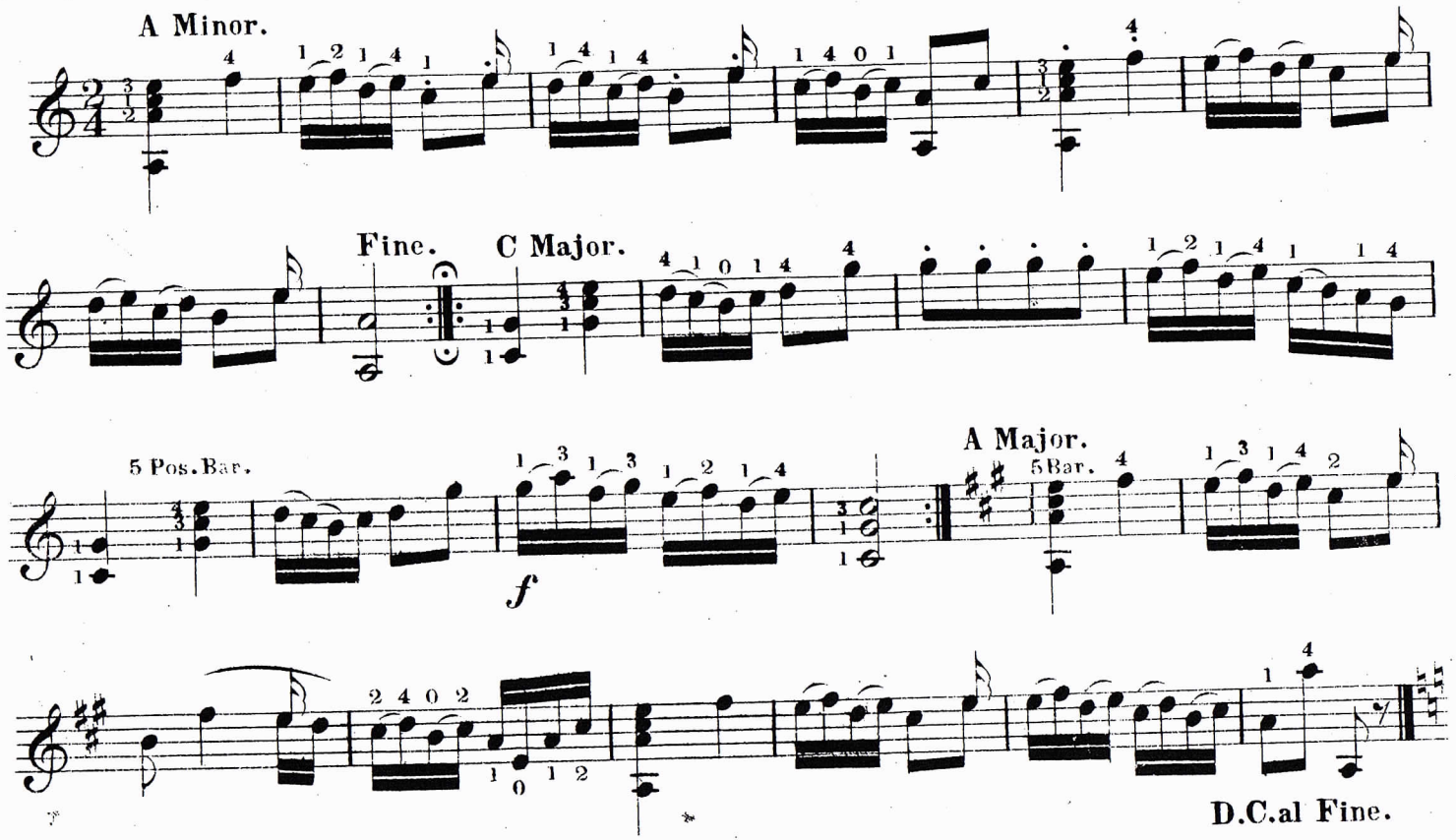
PINAFORE SONG



AIR FROM "BELLS OF CORNEVILLE."

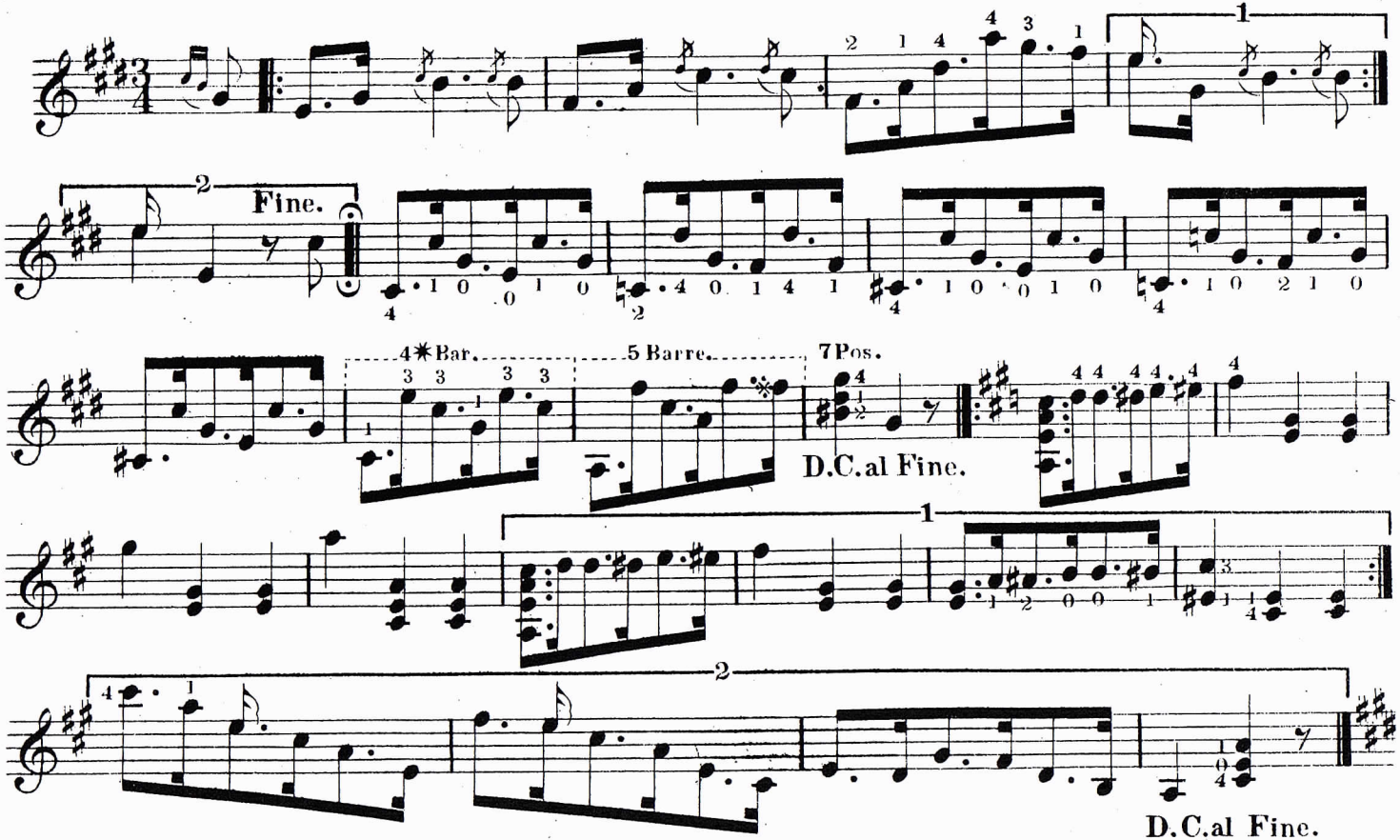


GORTON'S FAVORITE.

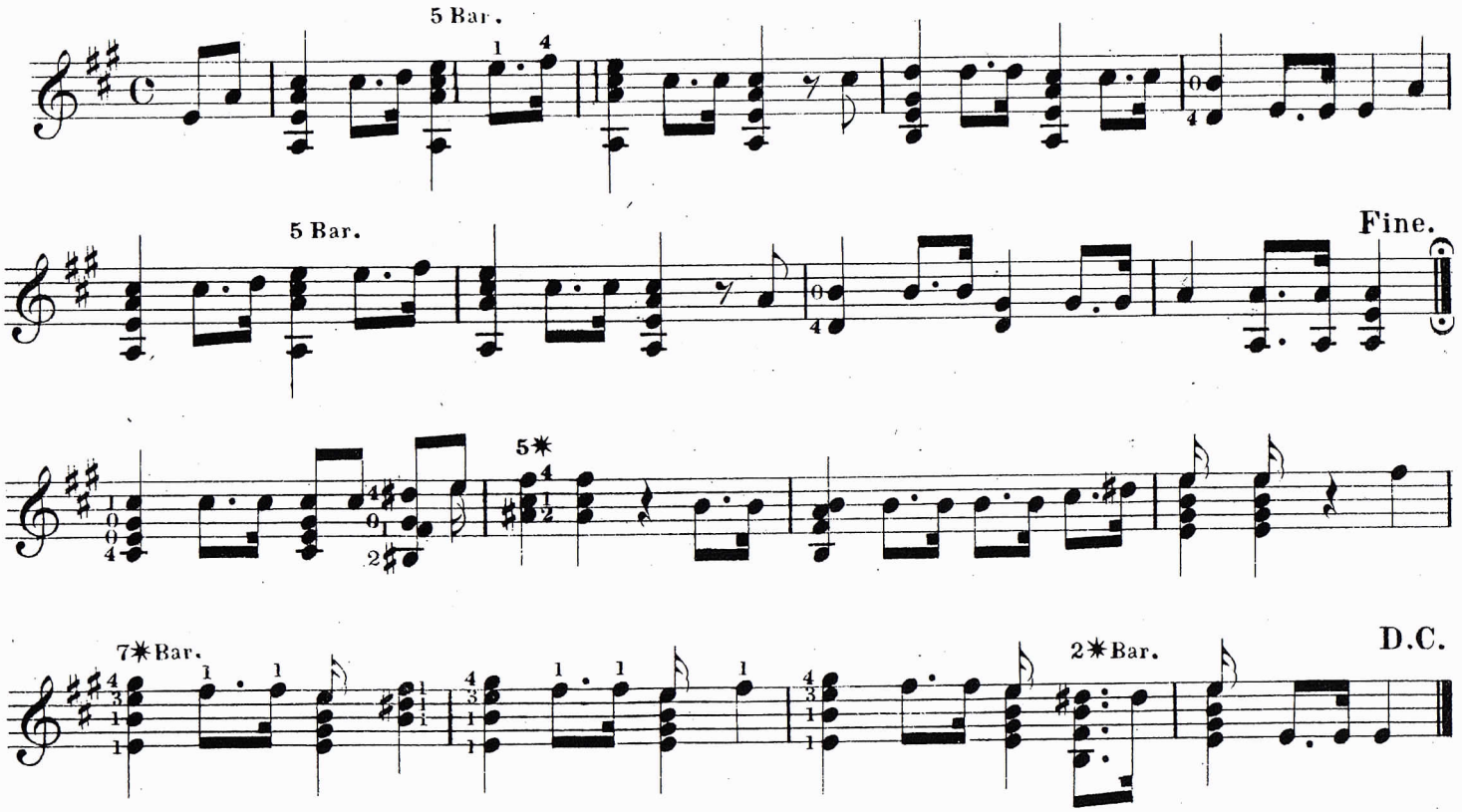


THE EMELINE MAZURKA.

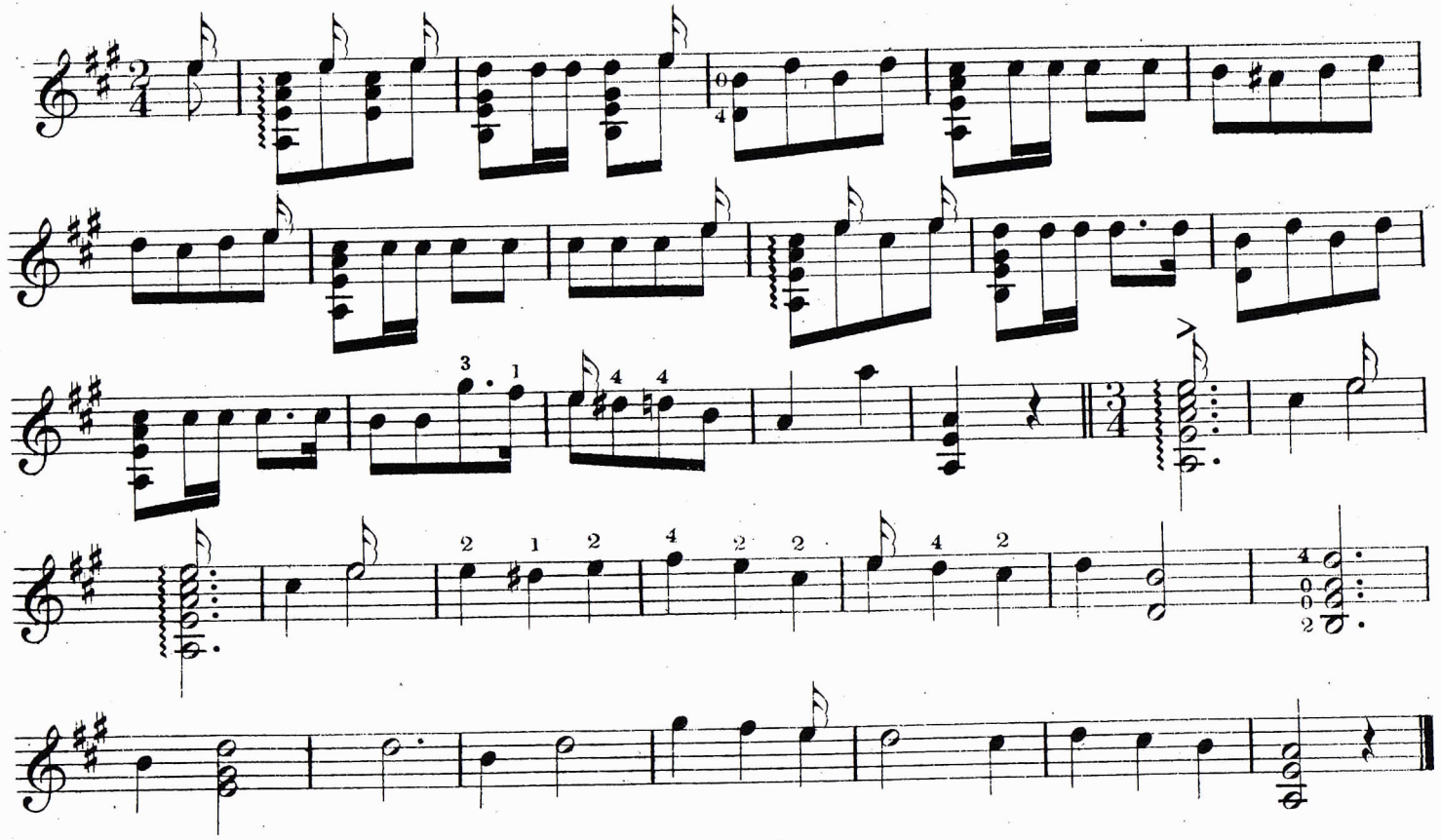
E.M.HALL.



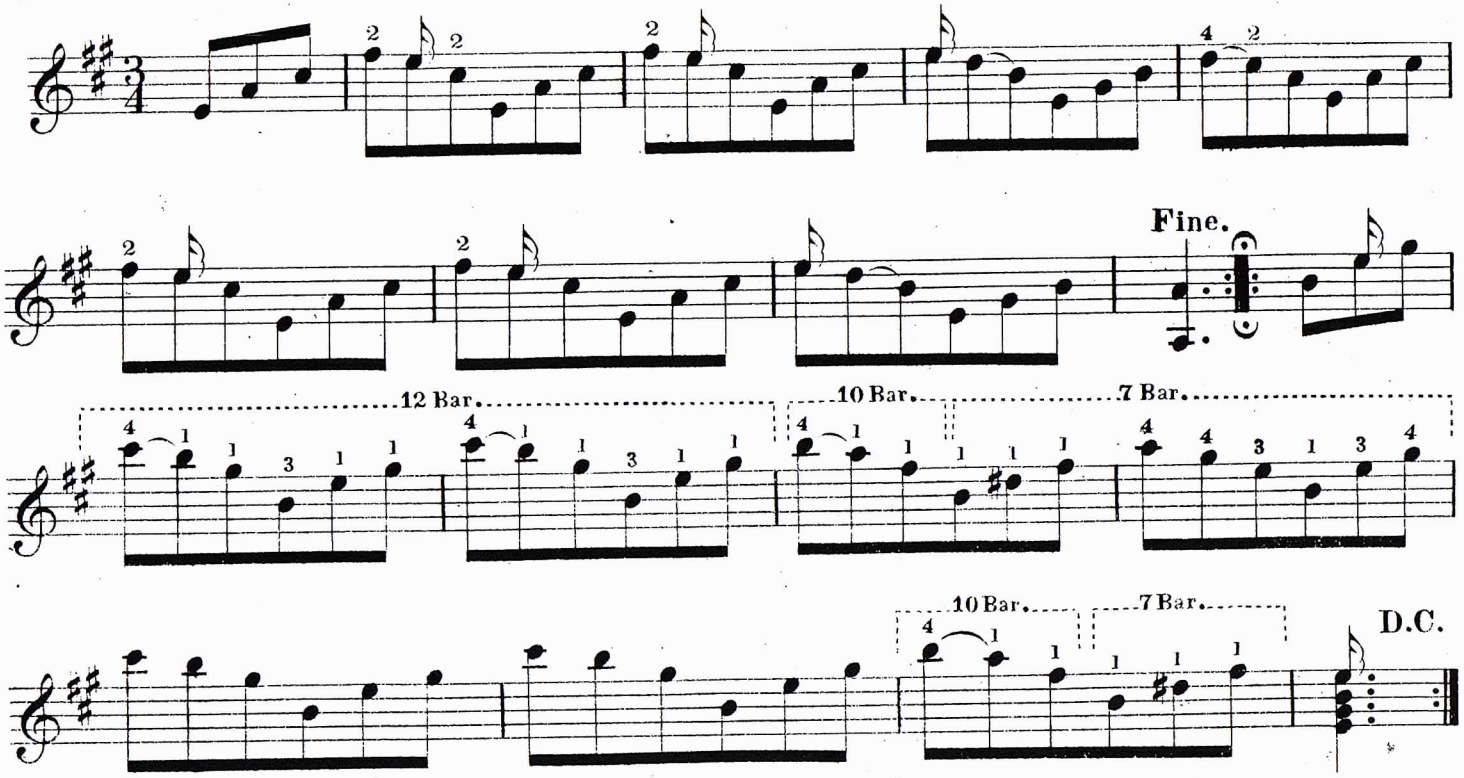
FRENCH MARCH.



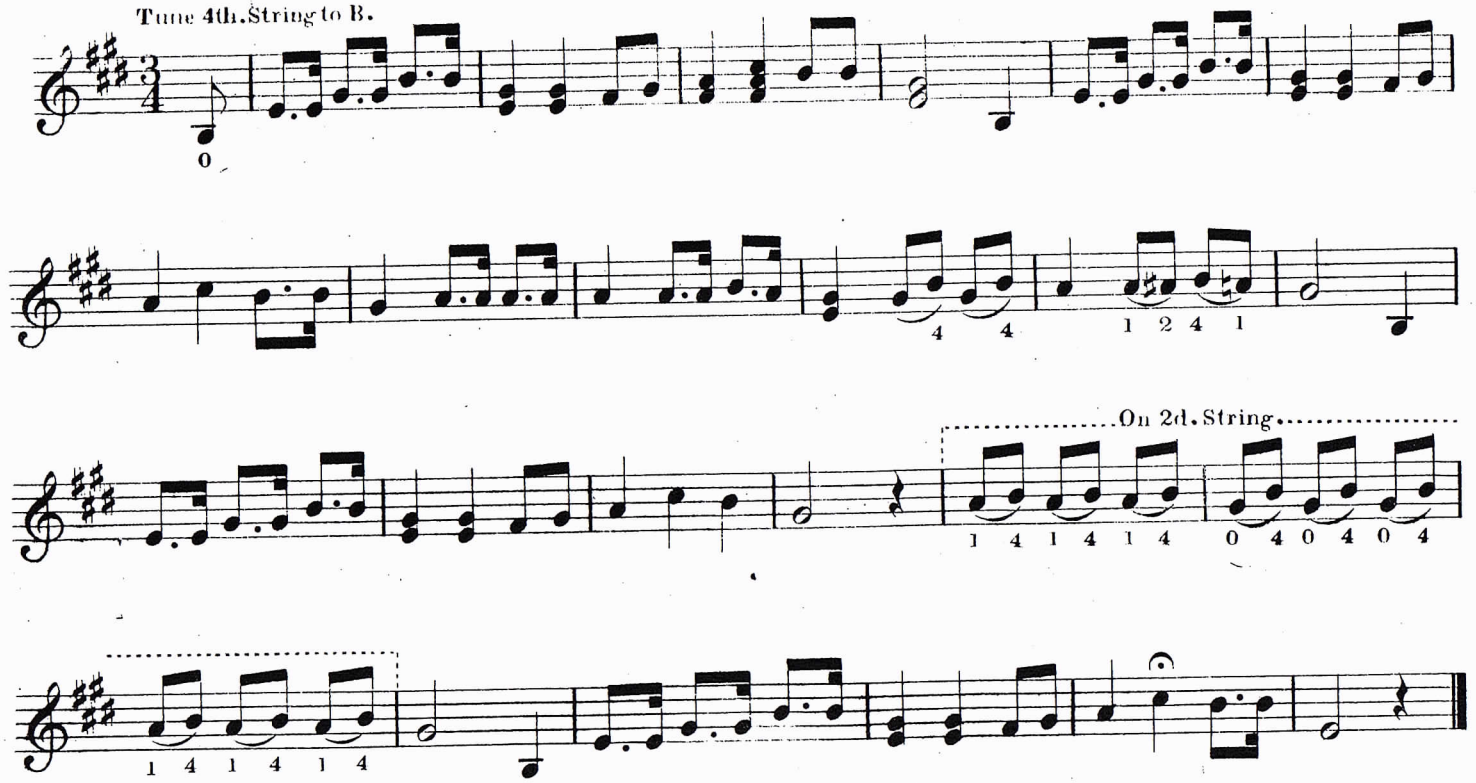
WHOA EMMA.



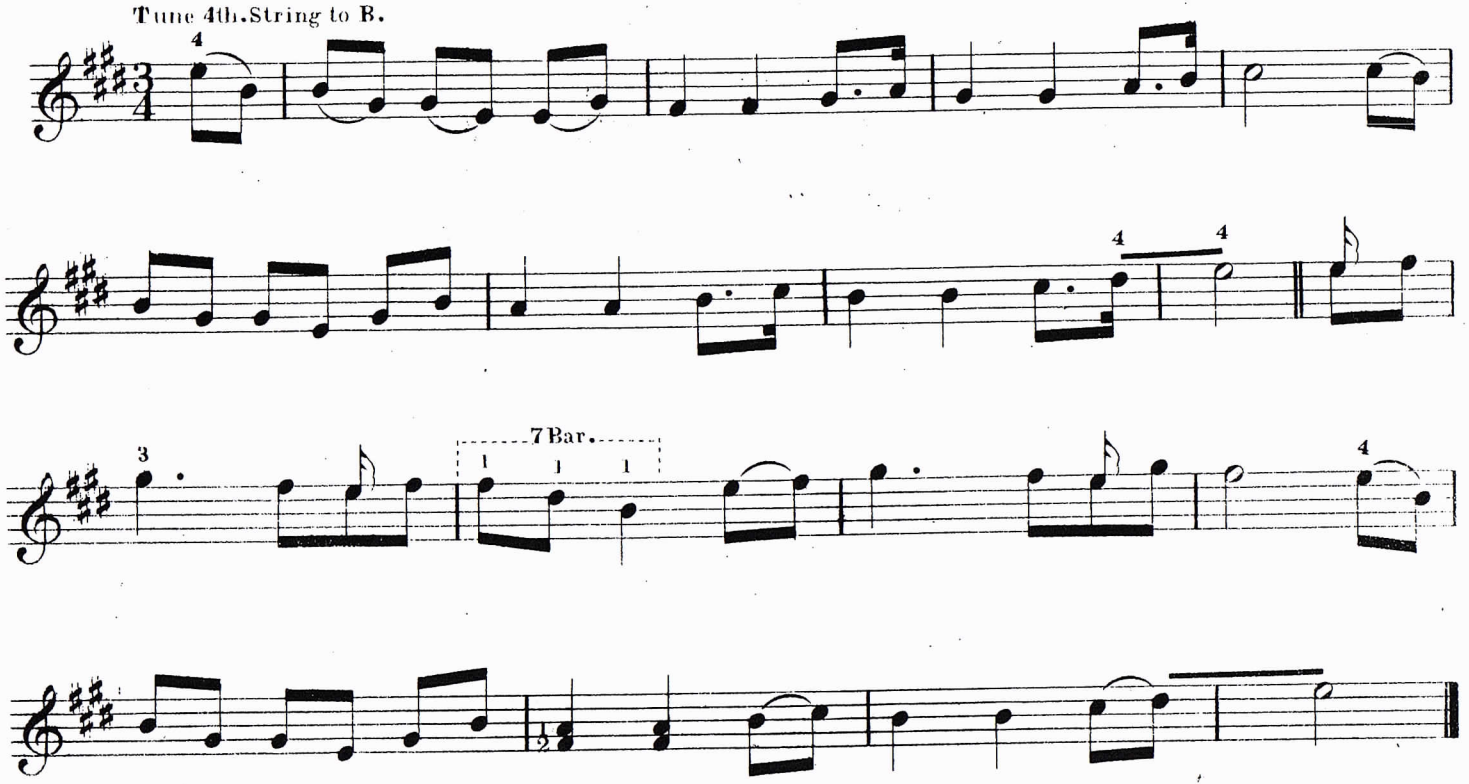
"WALTZ" BY ROBIN.



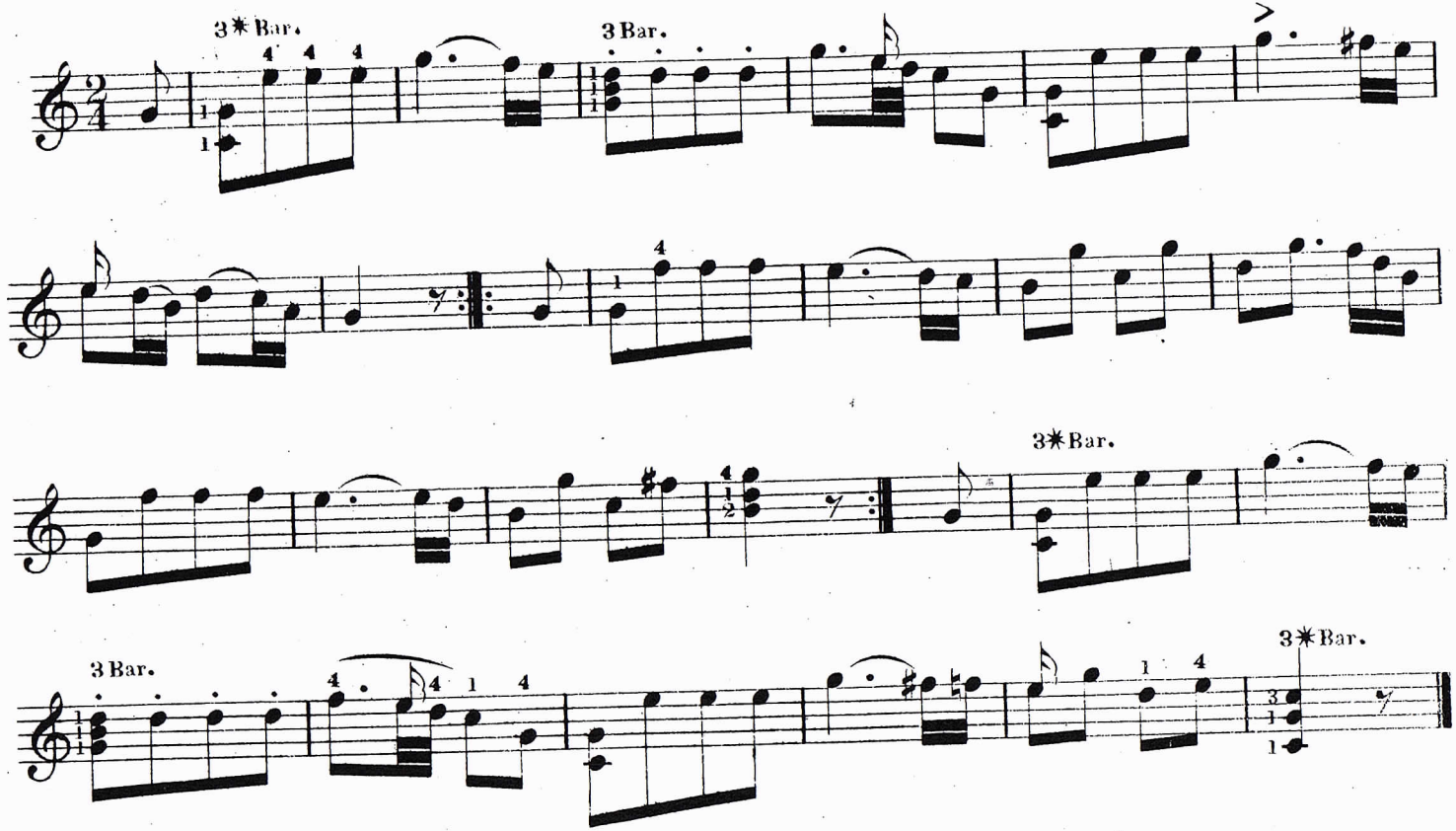
TYROLEAN AIR. No.1.



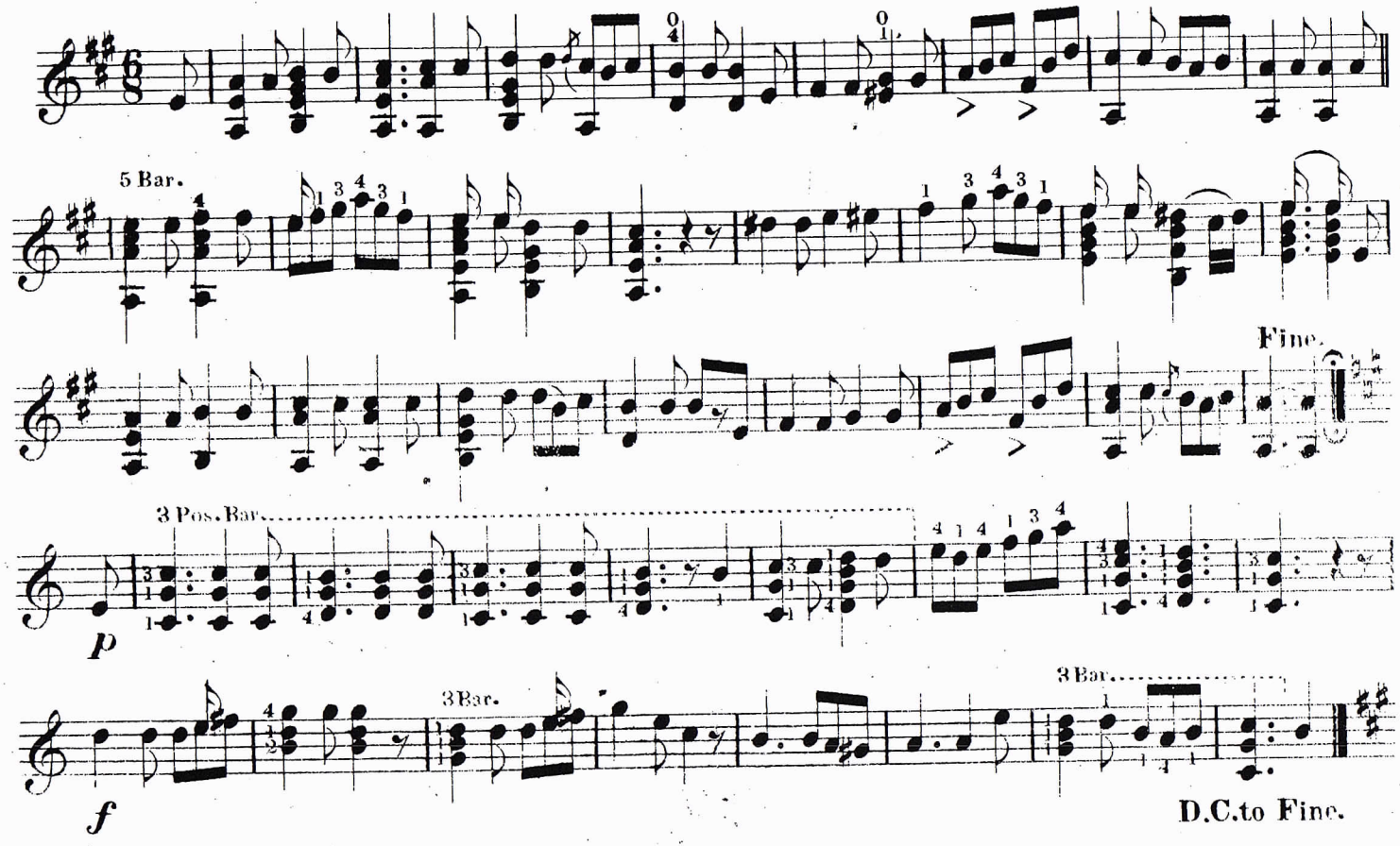
TYROLEAN AIR. No. 2.



"AIR" BY ROSSINI.

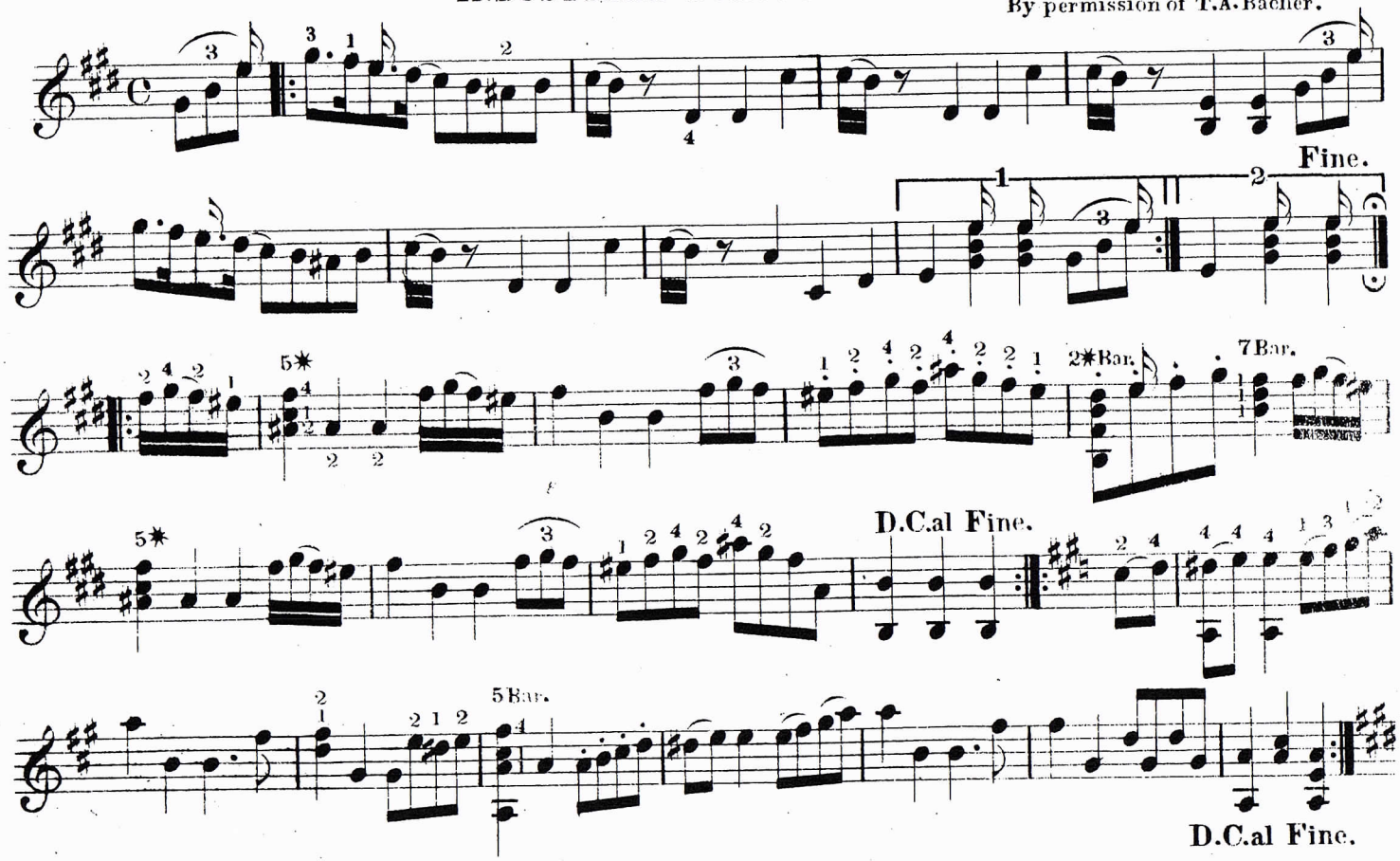


"MARCH" BY MARTINI.

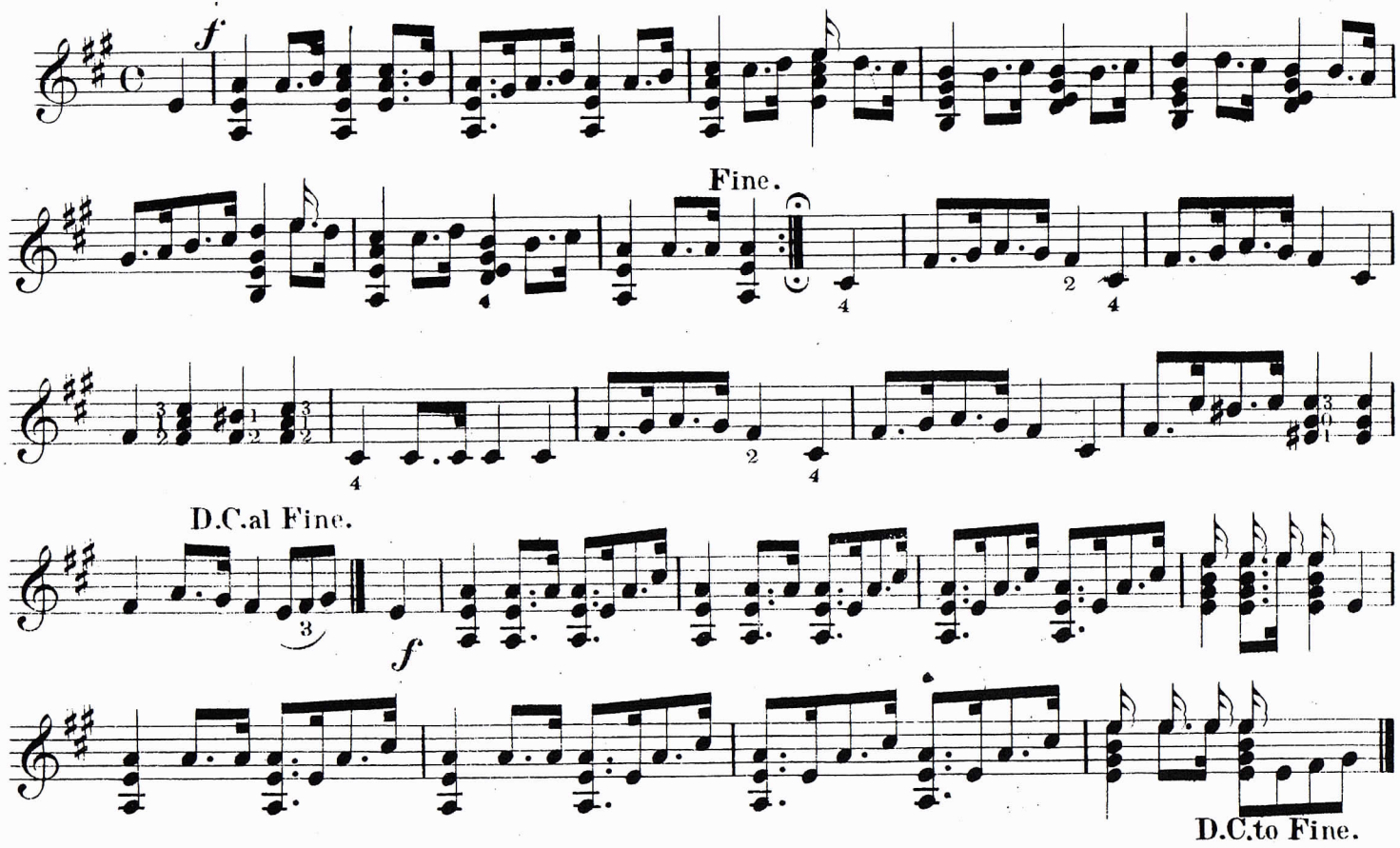


INDUSTRIAL SCHOTTISCHE.

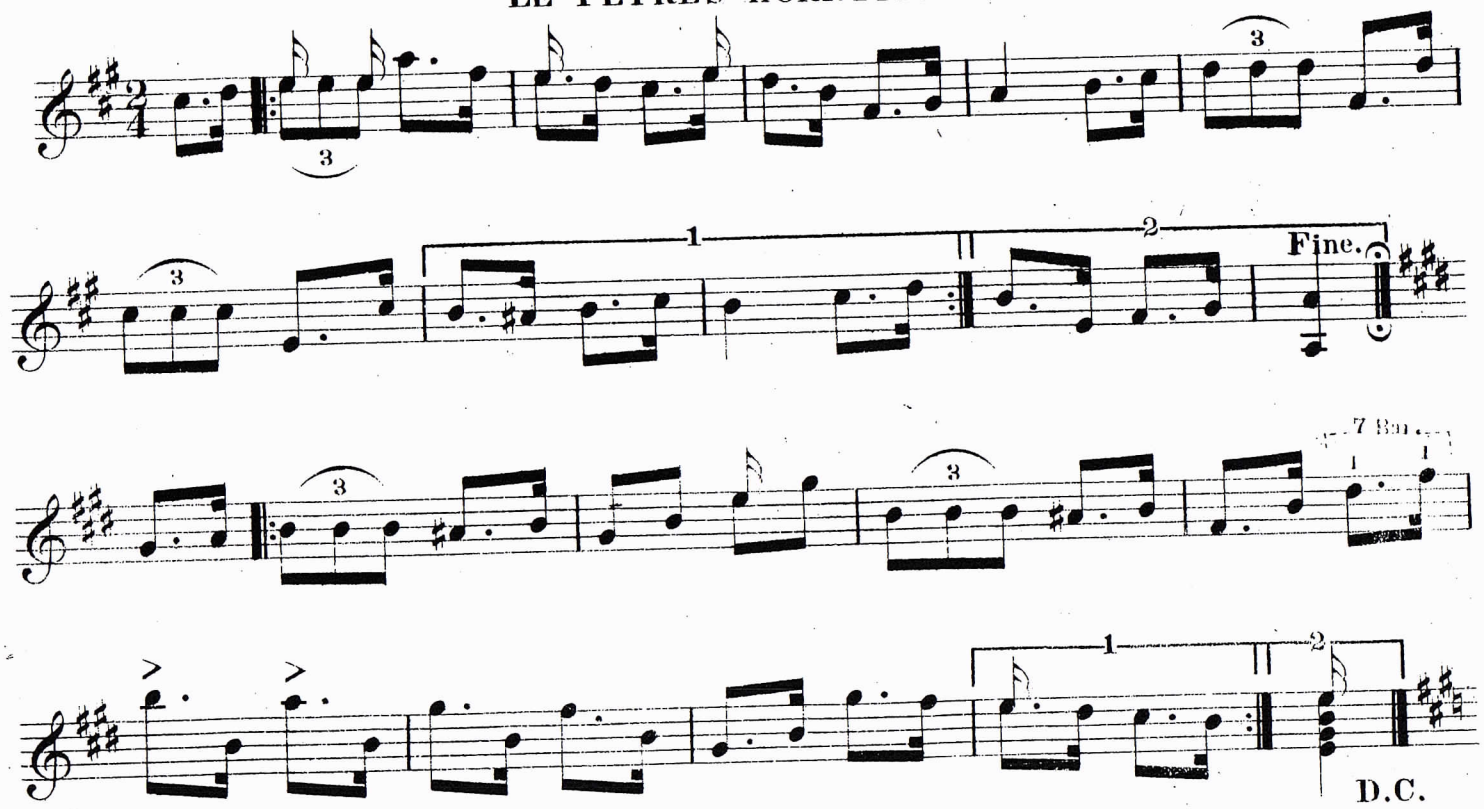
By permission of T.A. Bacher.



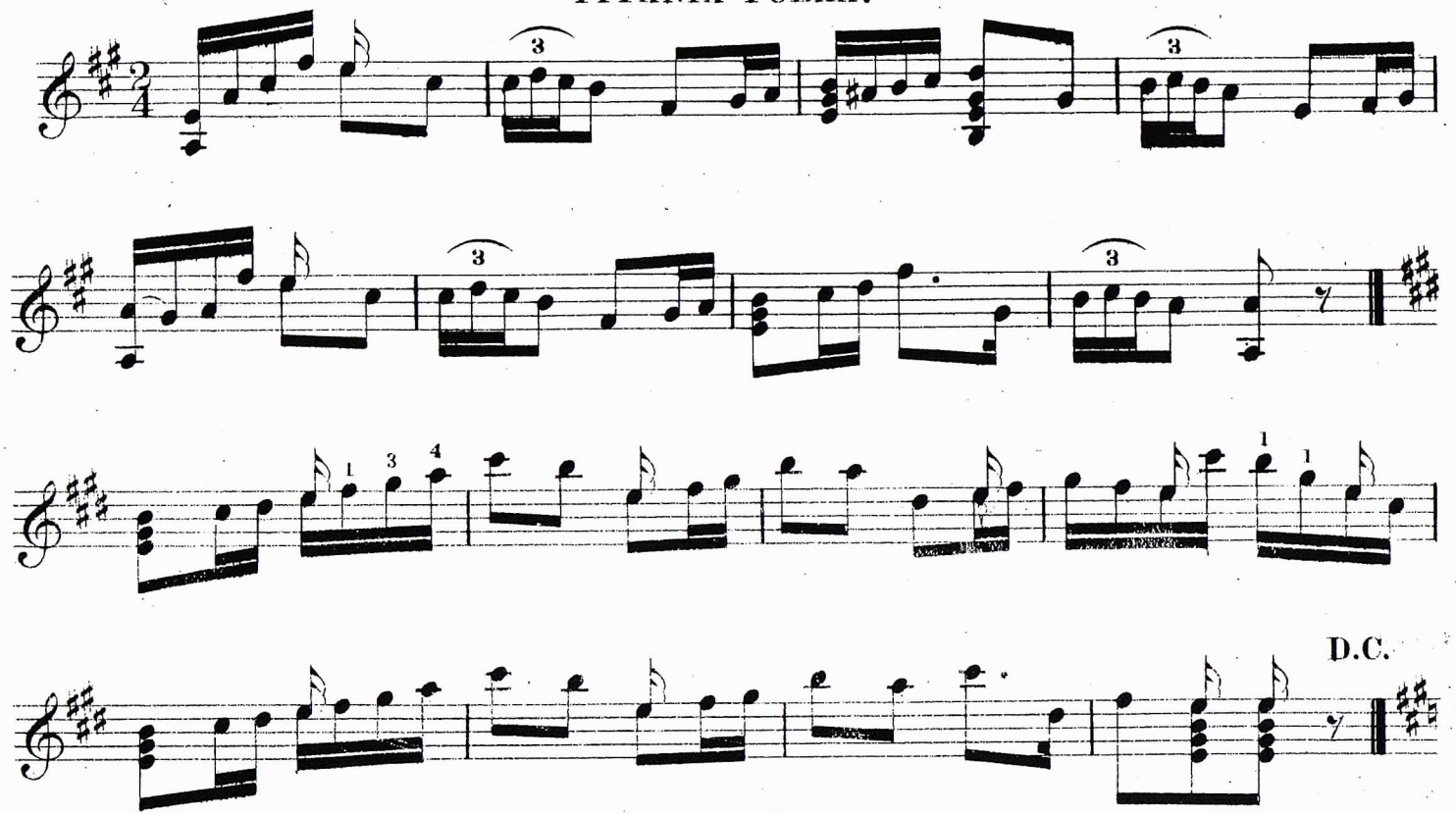
GRAND RUSSIAN MARCH.



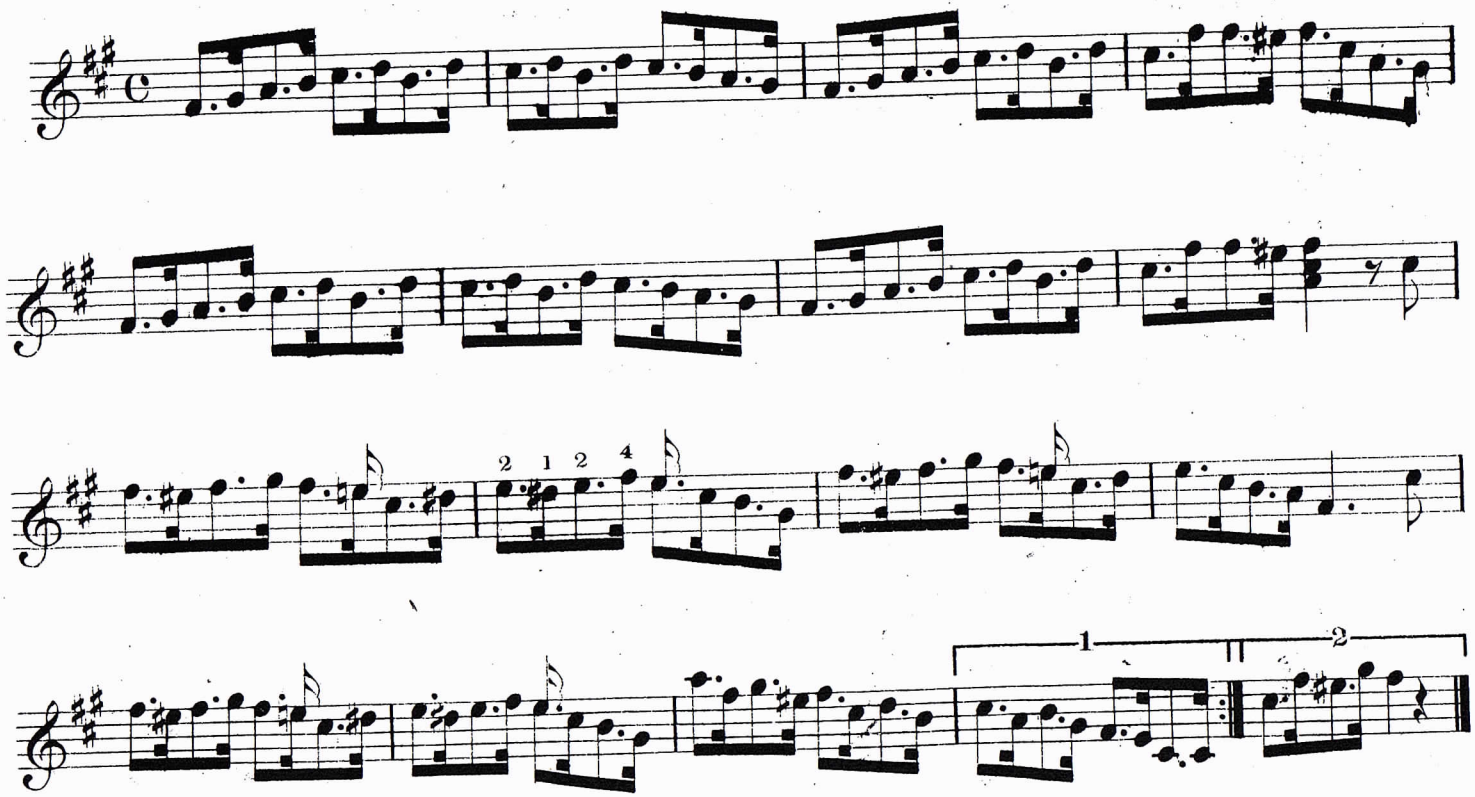
LE PETRES' HORNPIPE.



TITANIA POLKA.



PASTIMES ON THE LEVEE.



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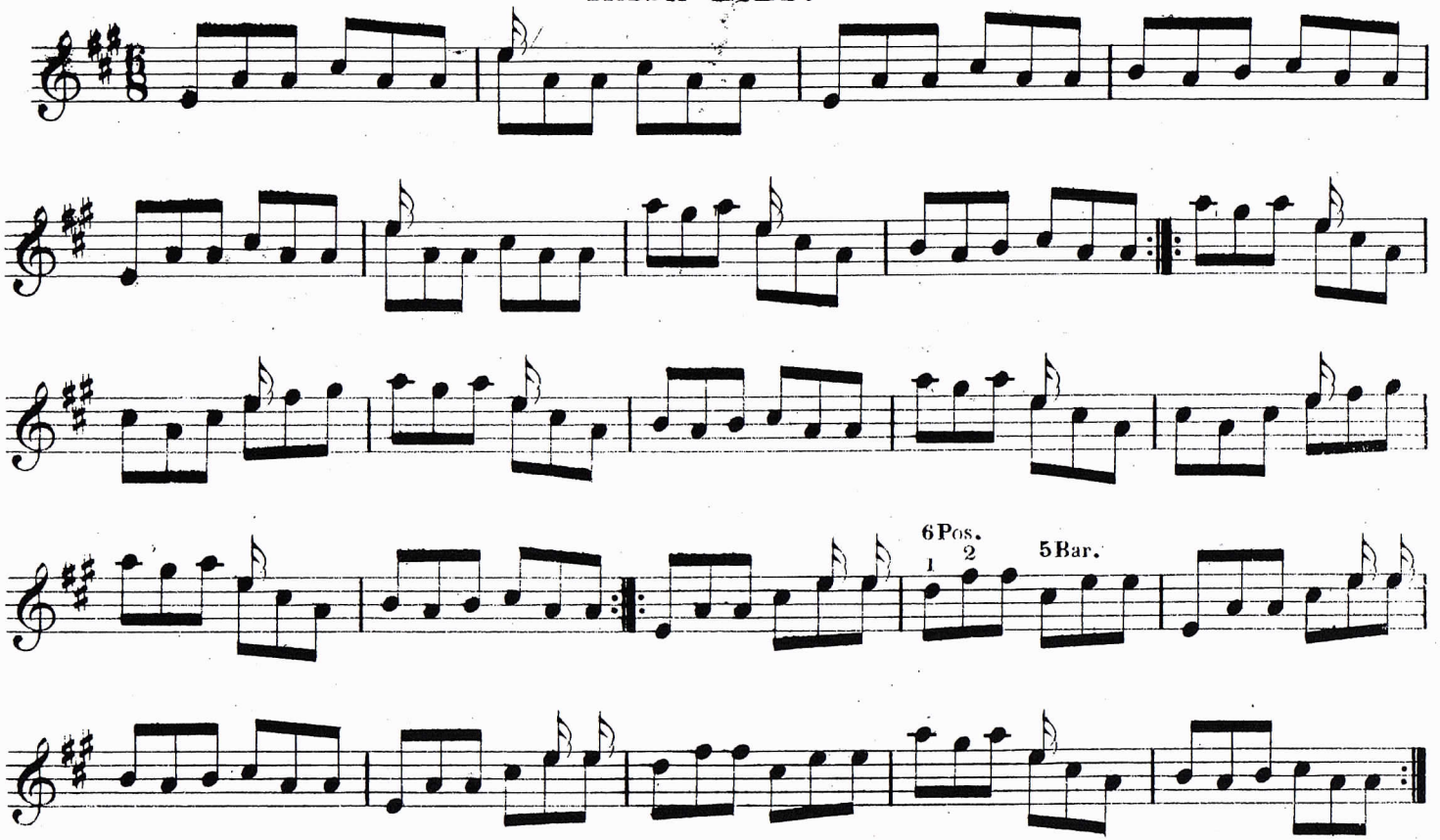
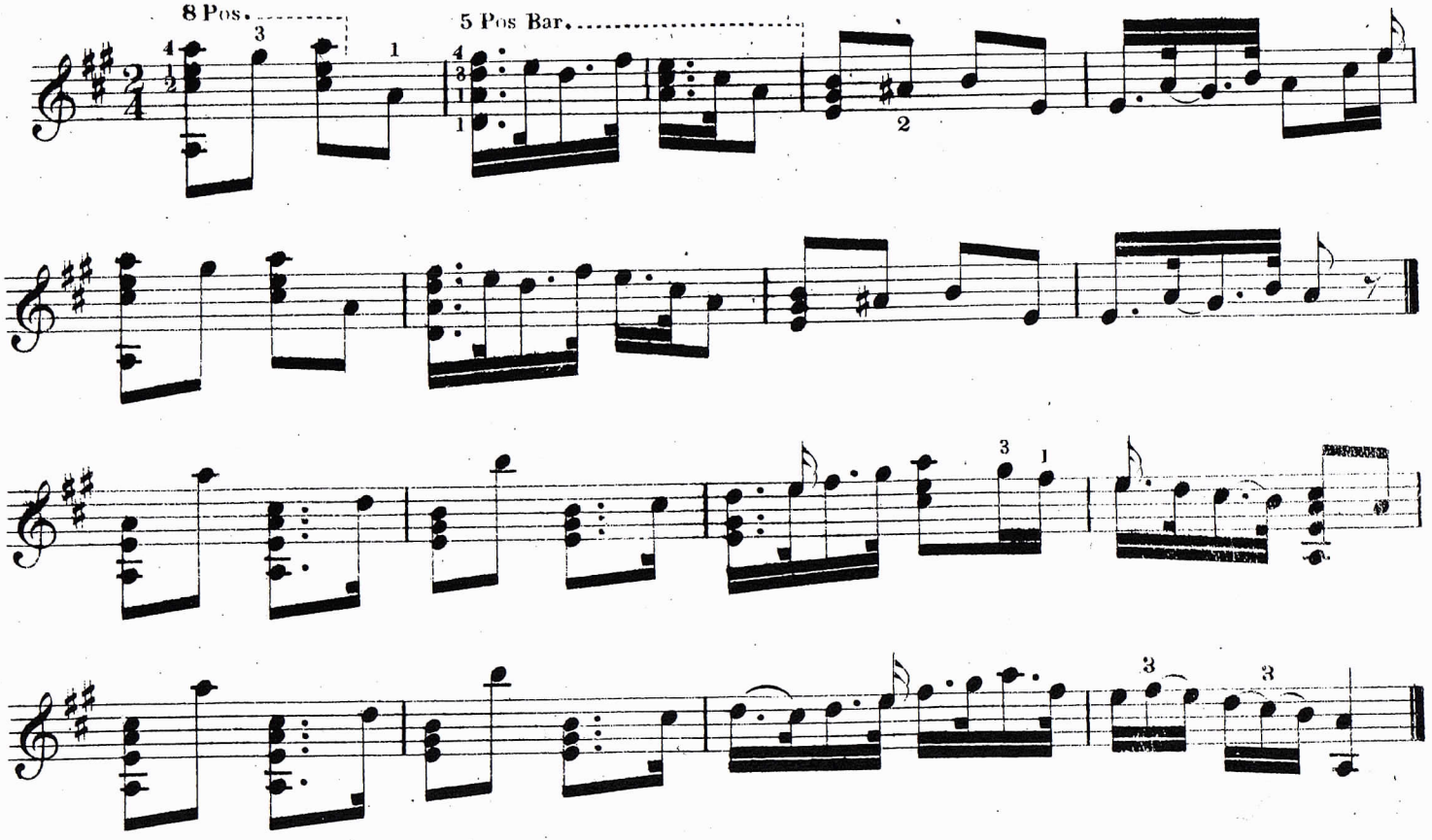
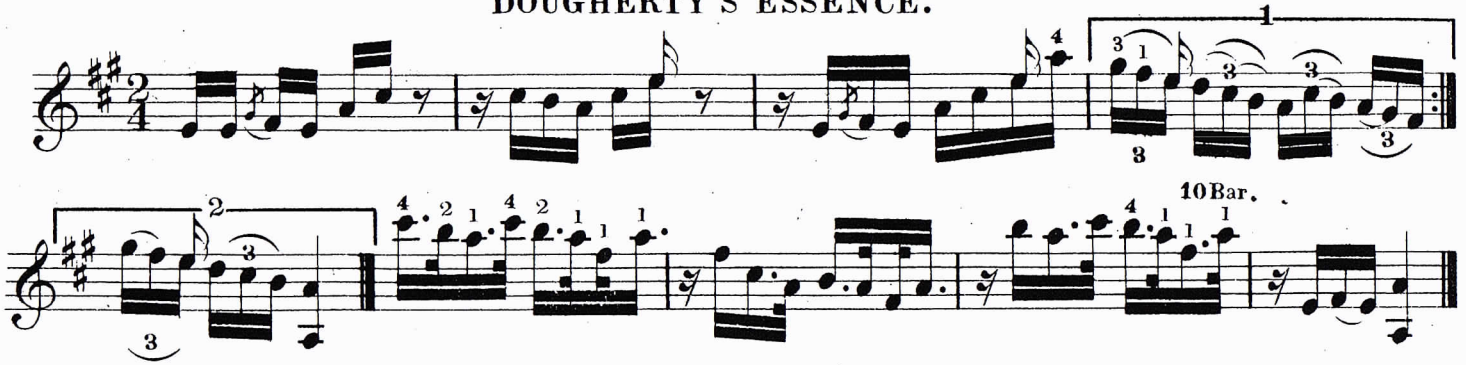


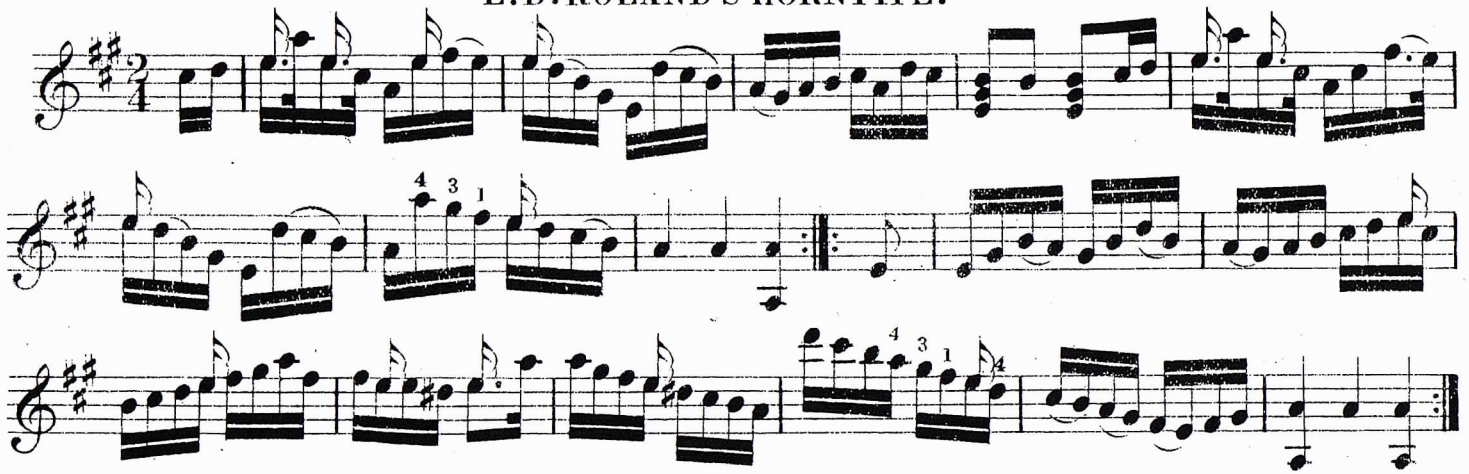
KITTY O'NEIL'S JIG.



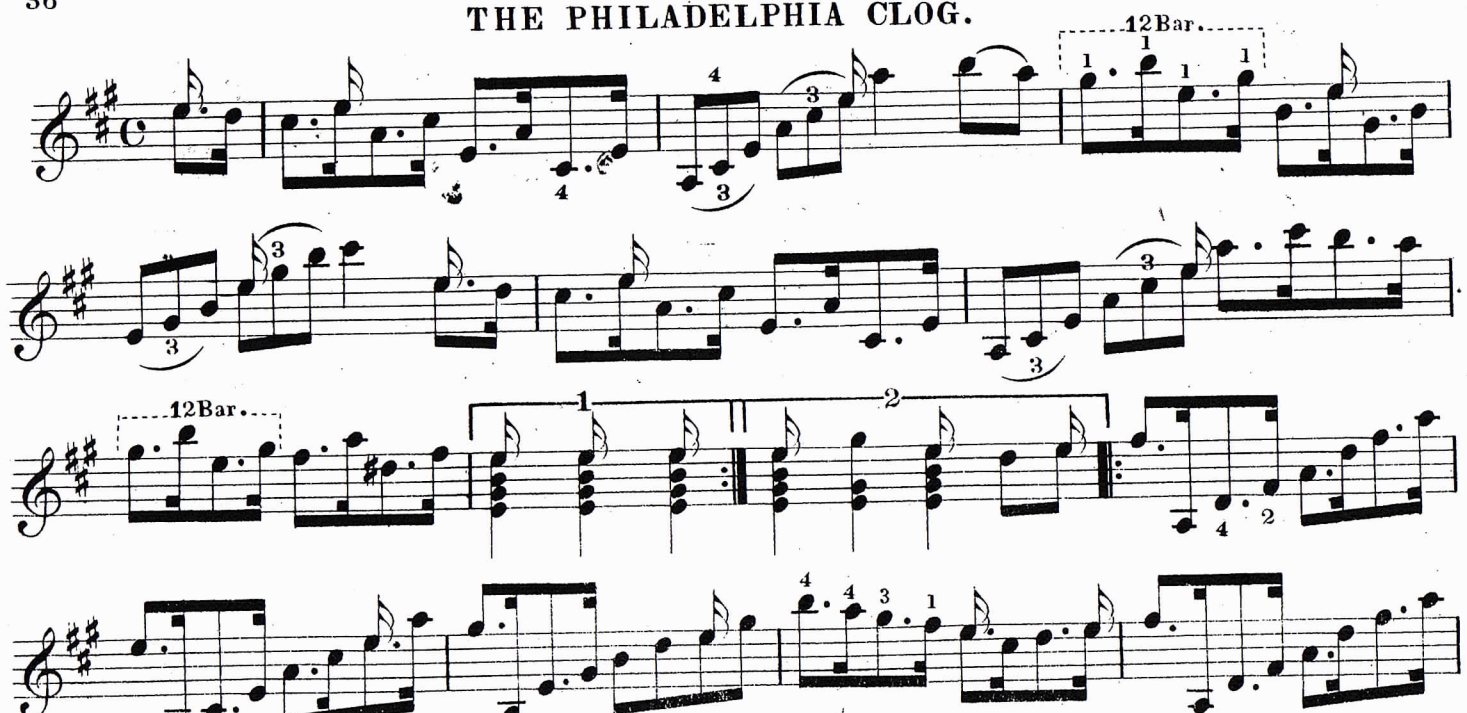
DOUGHERTY'S ESSENCE.



E.D. ROLAND'S HORNPIPE.

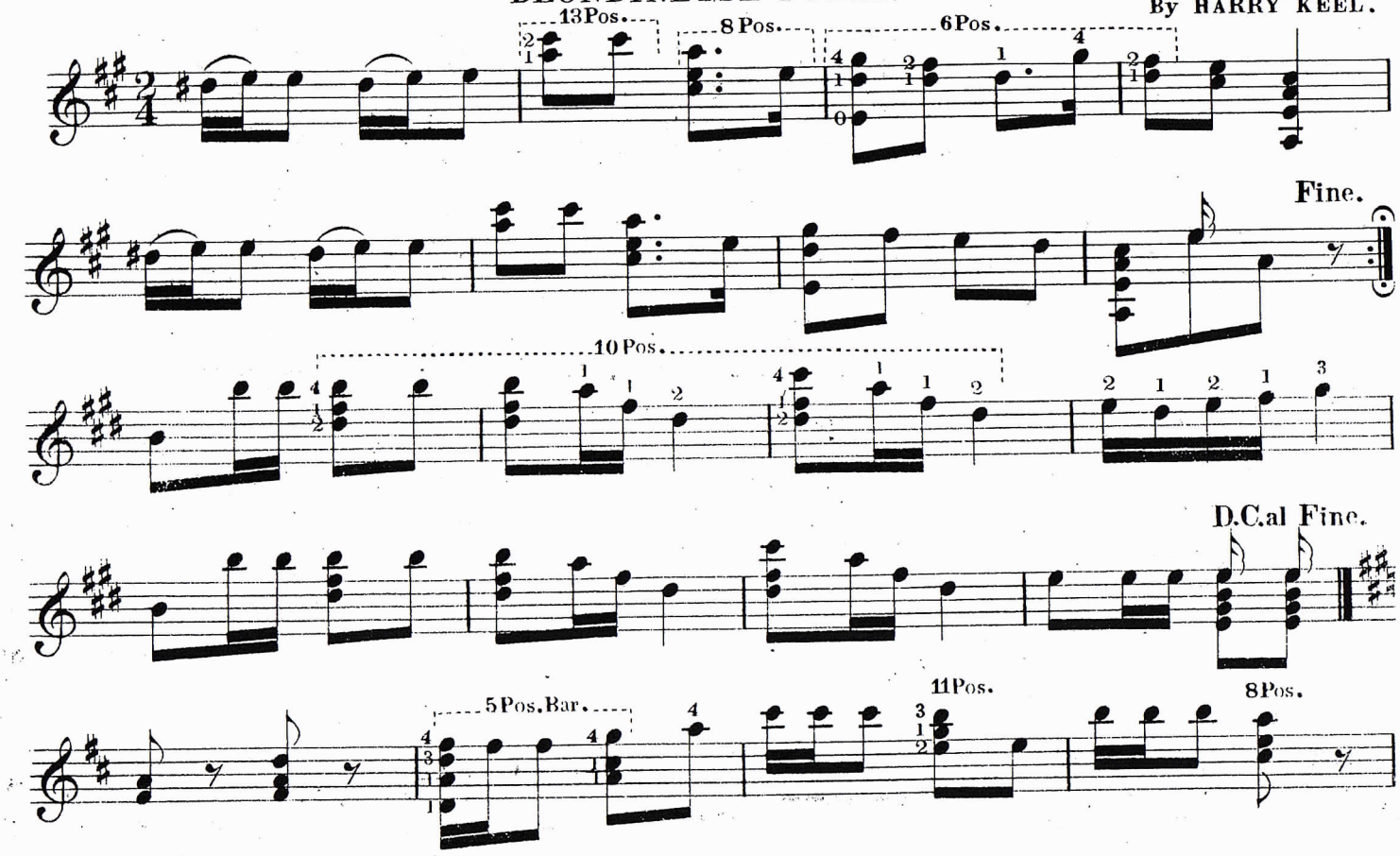


THE PHILADELPHIA CLOG.

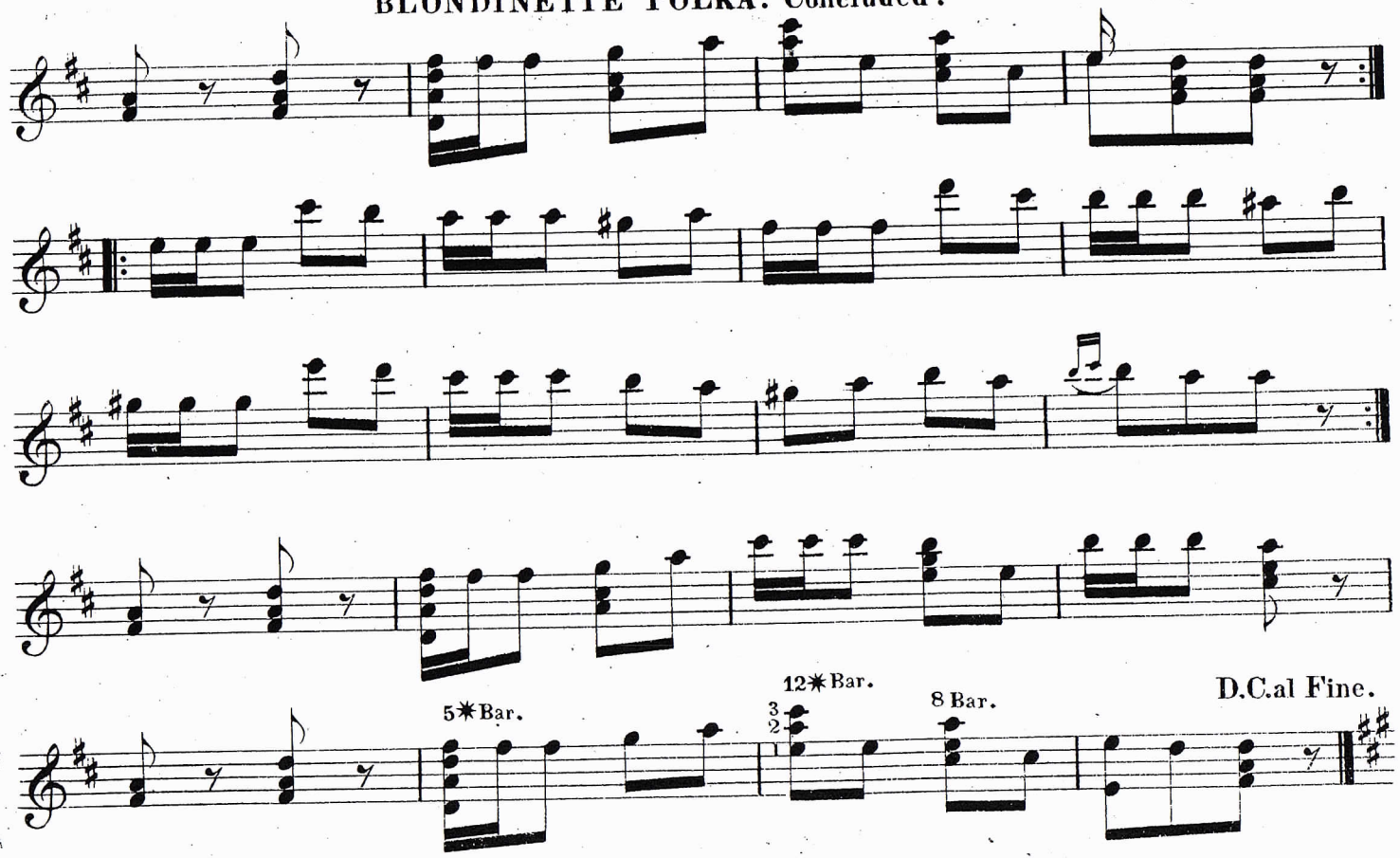


BLONDINETTE POLKA.

By HARRY KEEL.

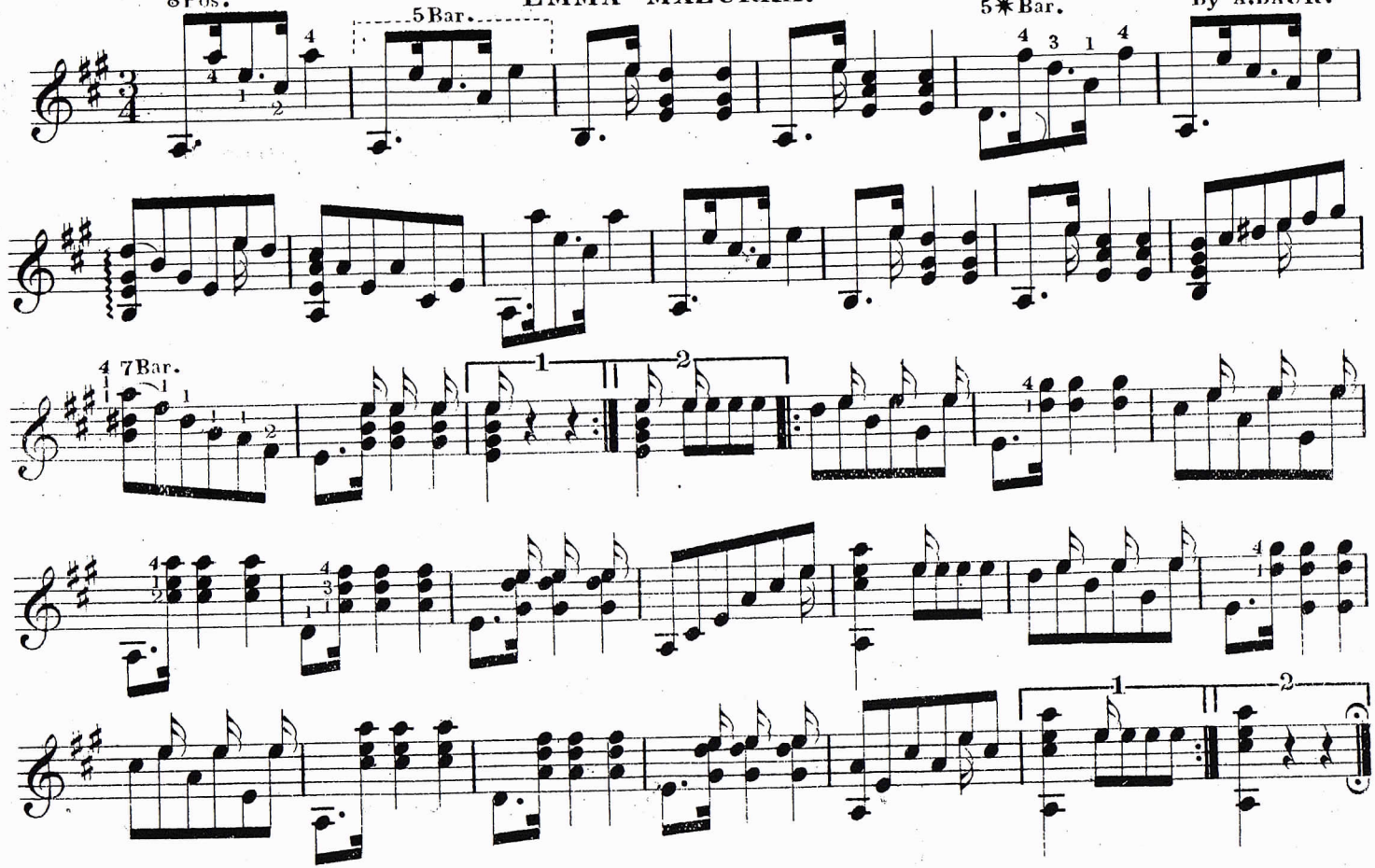


BLONDINETTE POLKA. Concluded.



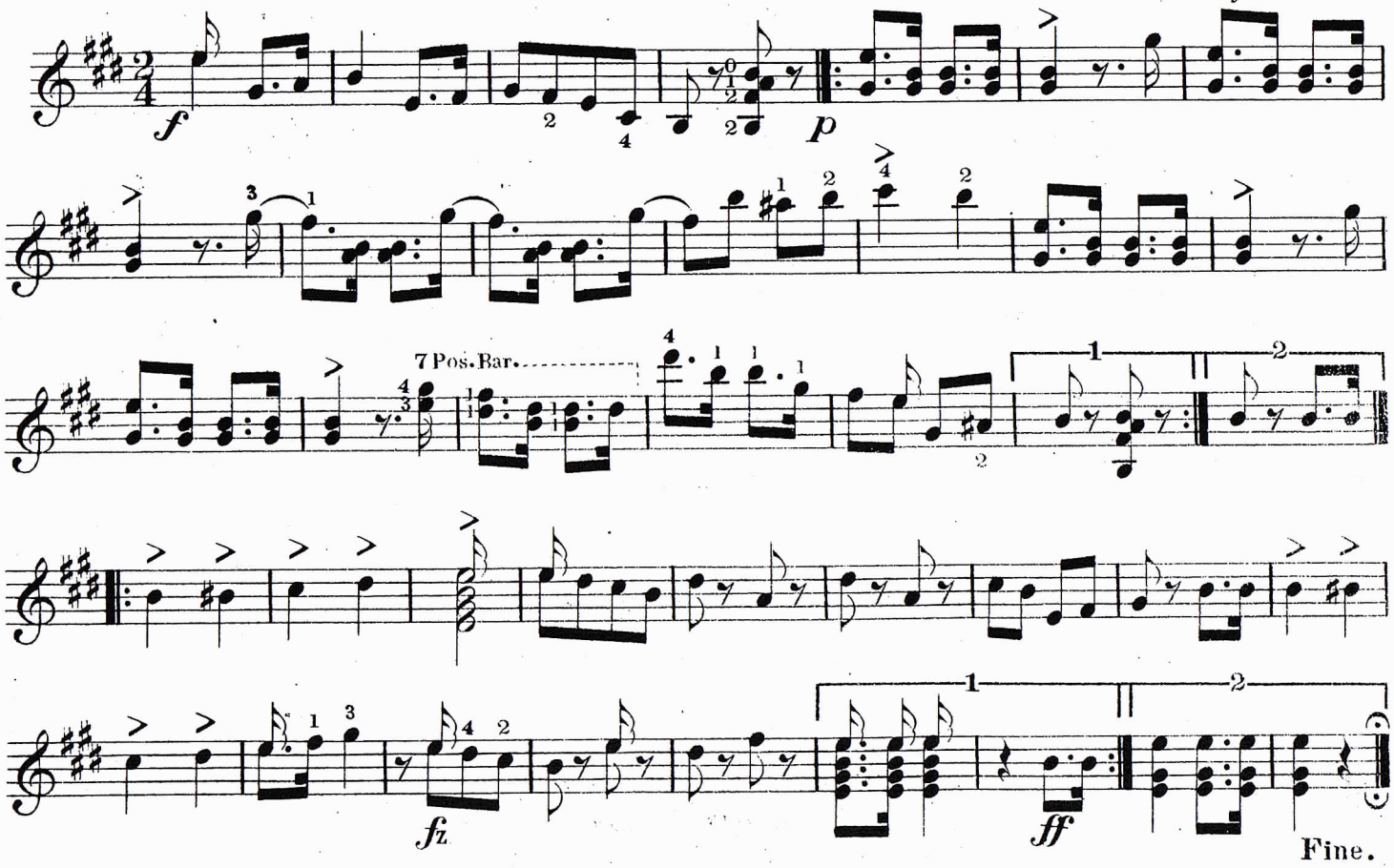
EMMA MAZURKA.

8Pos. 5Bar. 5✱Bar. By A.BAUR.



ATTACK GALOP.

Arr. by A. BAUR.



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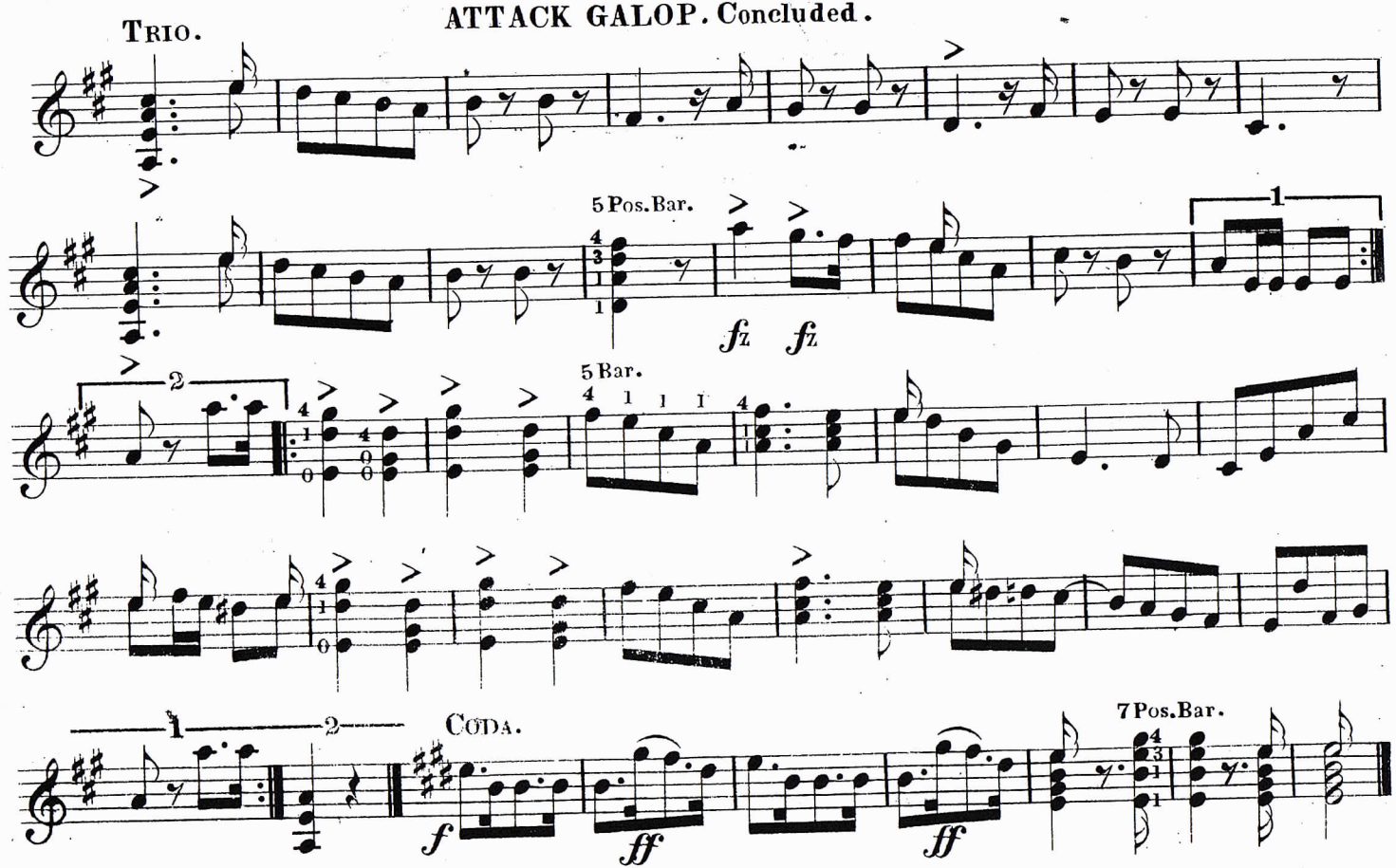
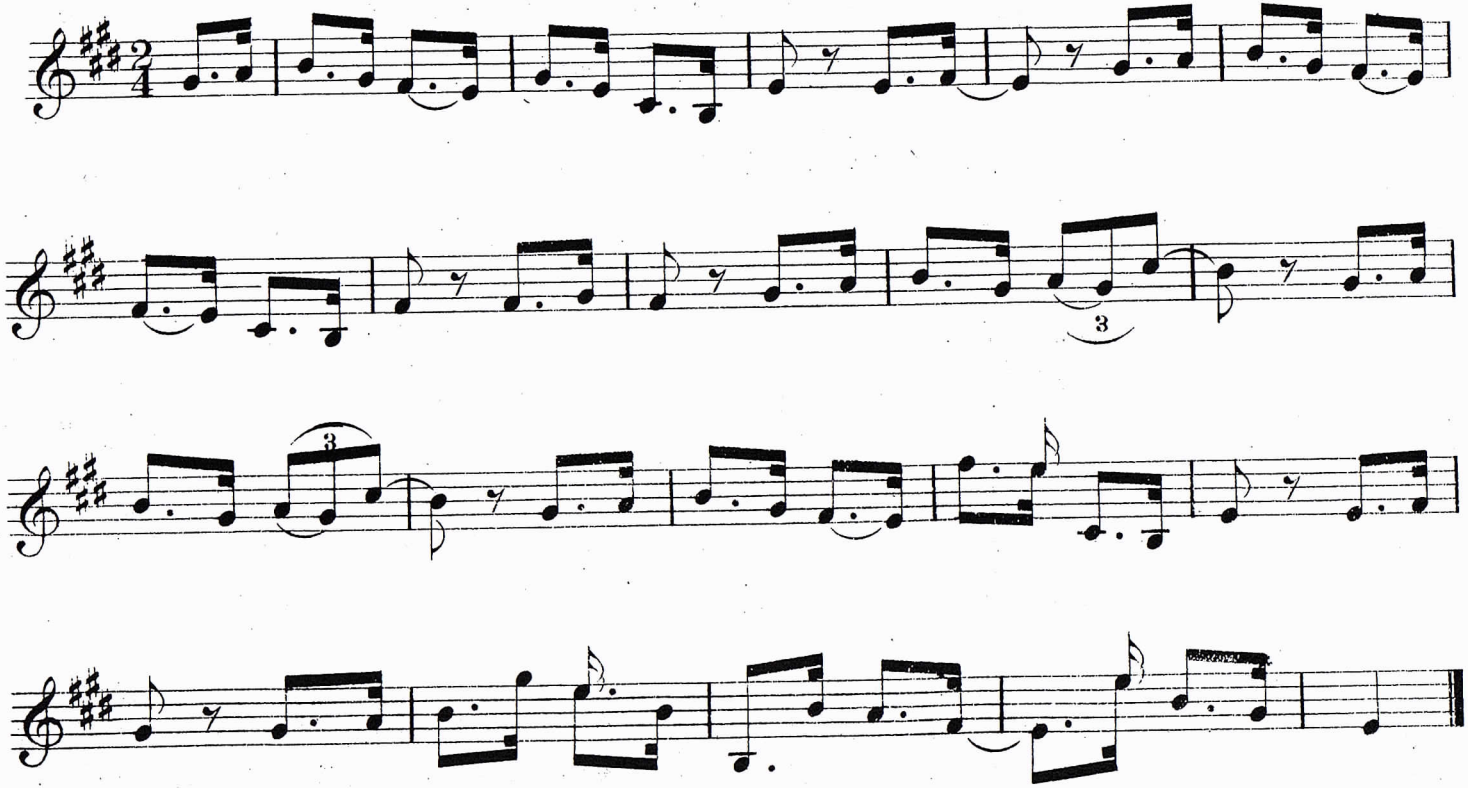
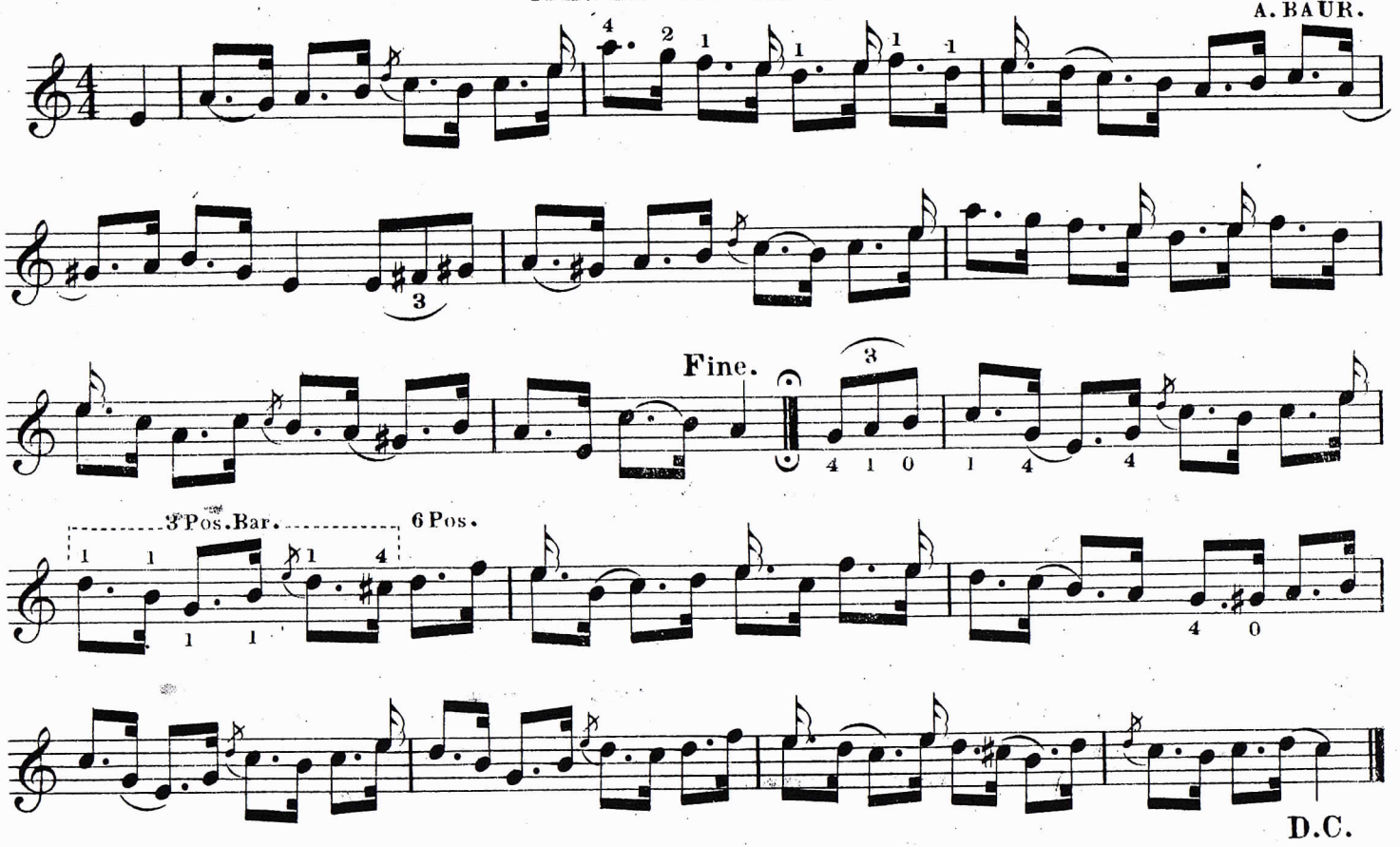


MY BOARD BILL CLOG.



MASTADON CLOG.

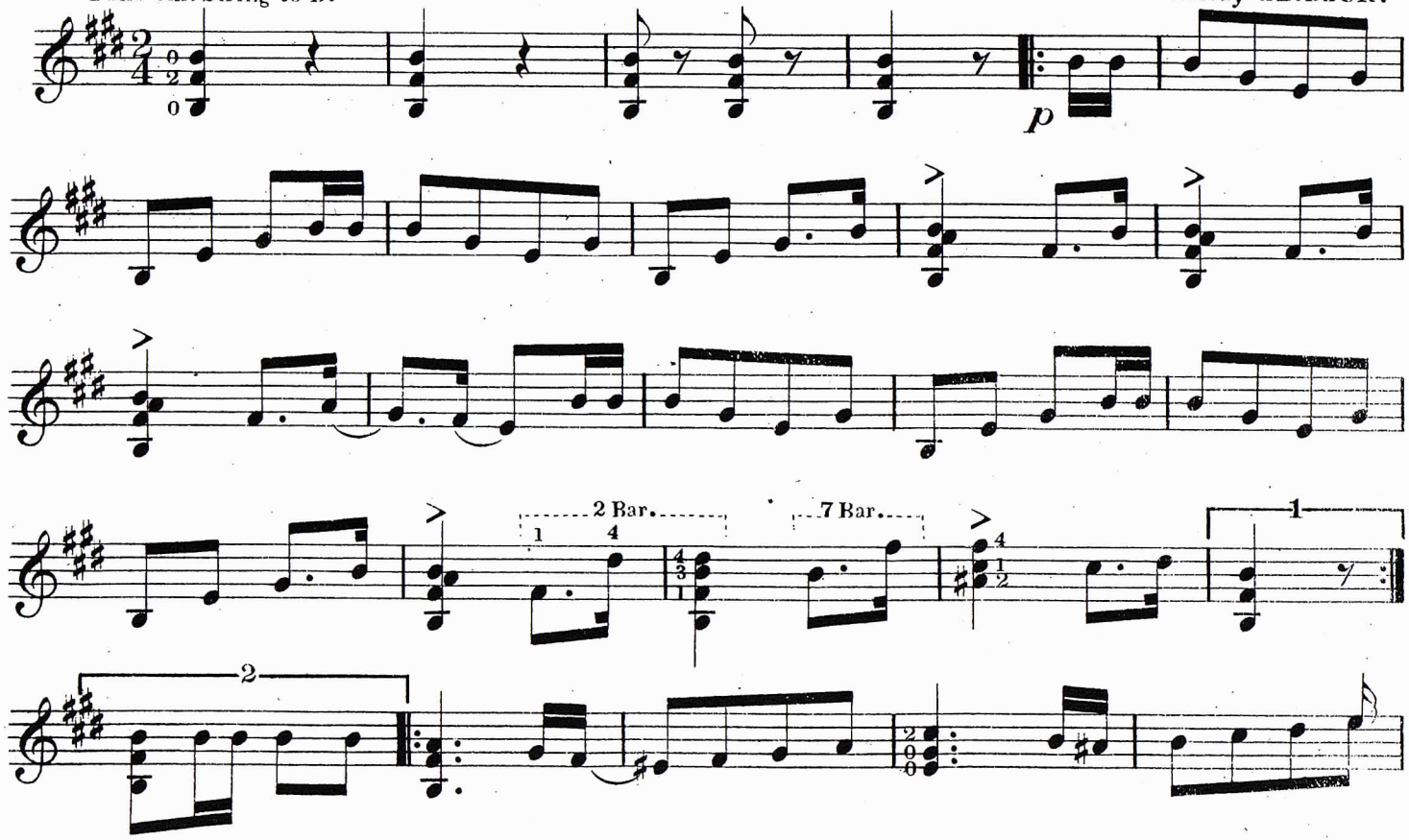
A. BAUR.



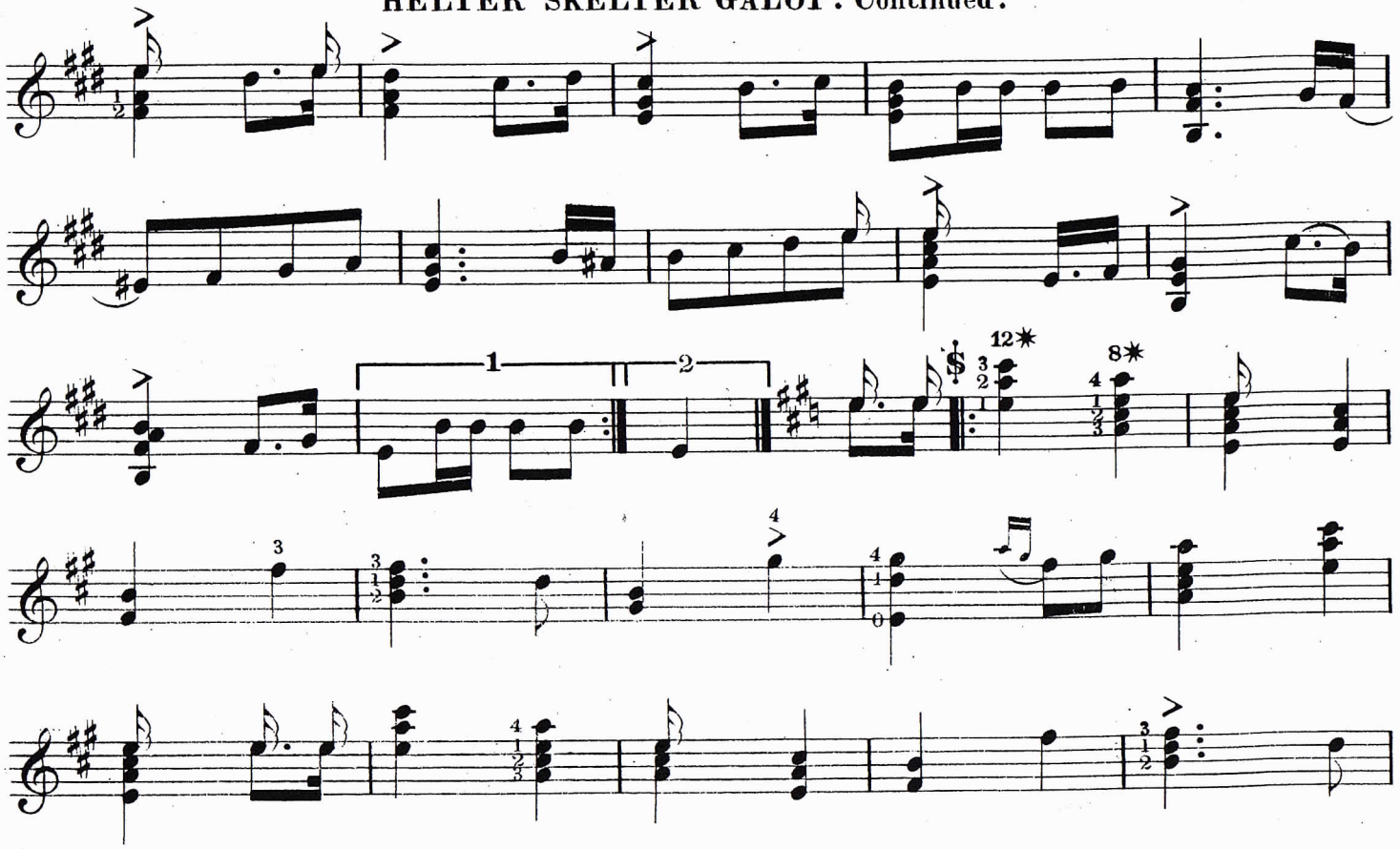
HELTER SKELTER GALOP.

Tune 4th. String to B.

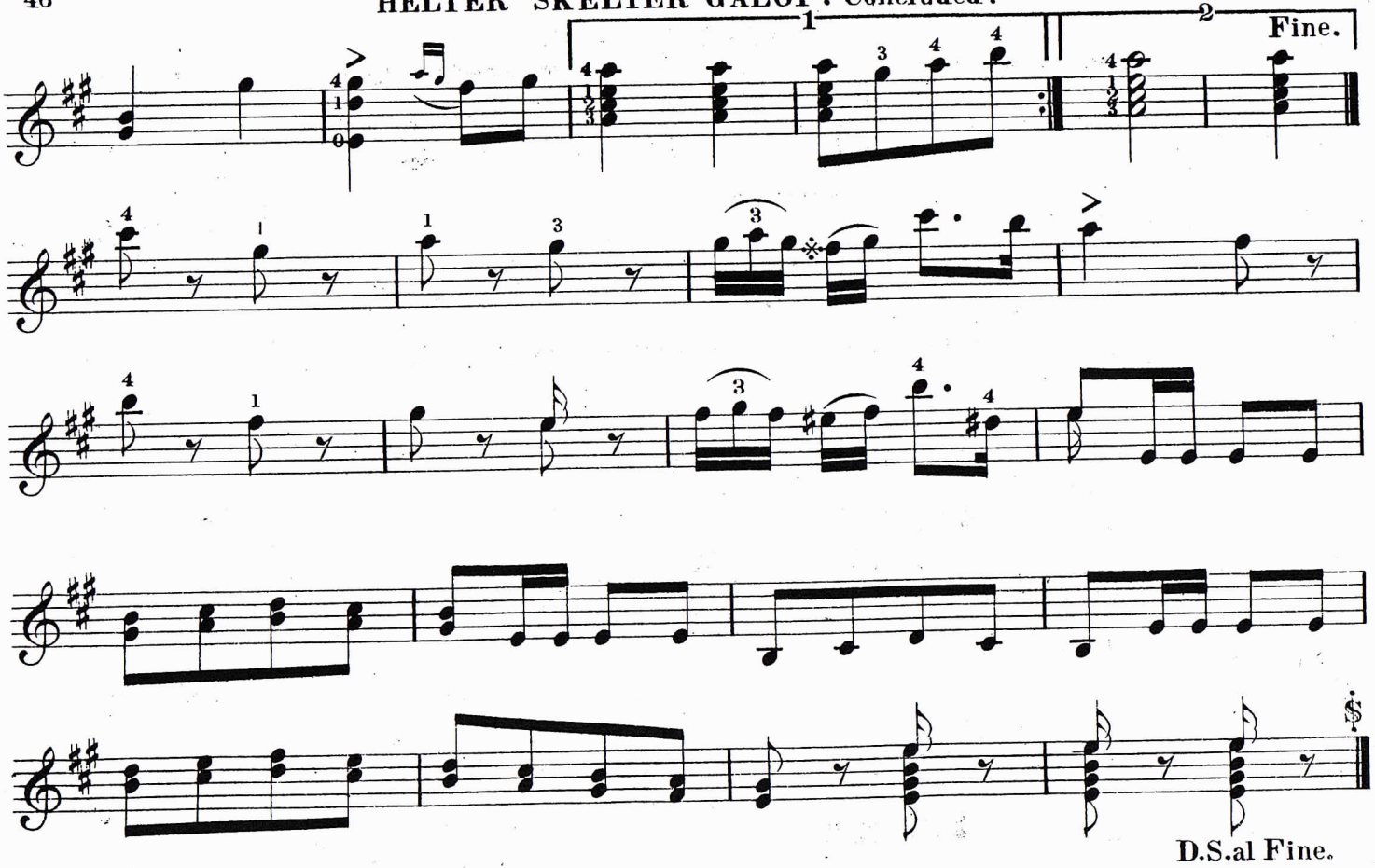
Arr: by AL. BAUR.



HELTER SKELTER GALOP. Continued.

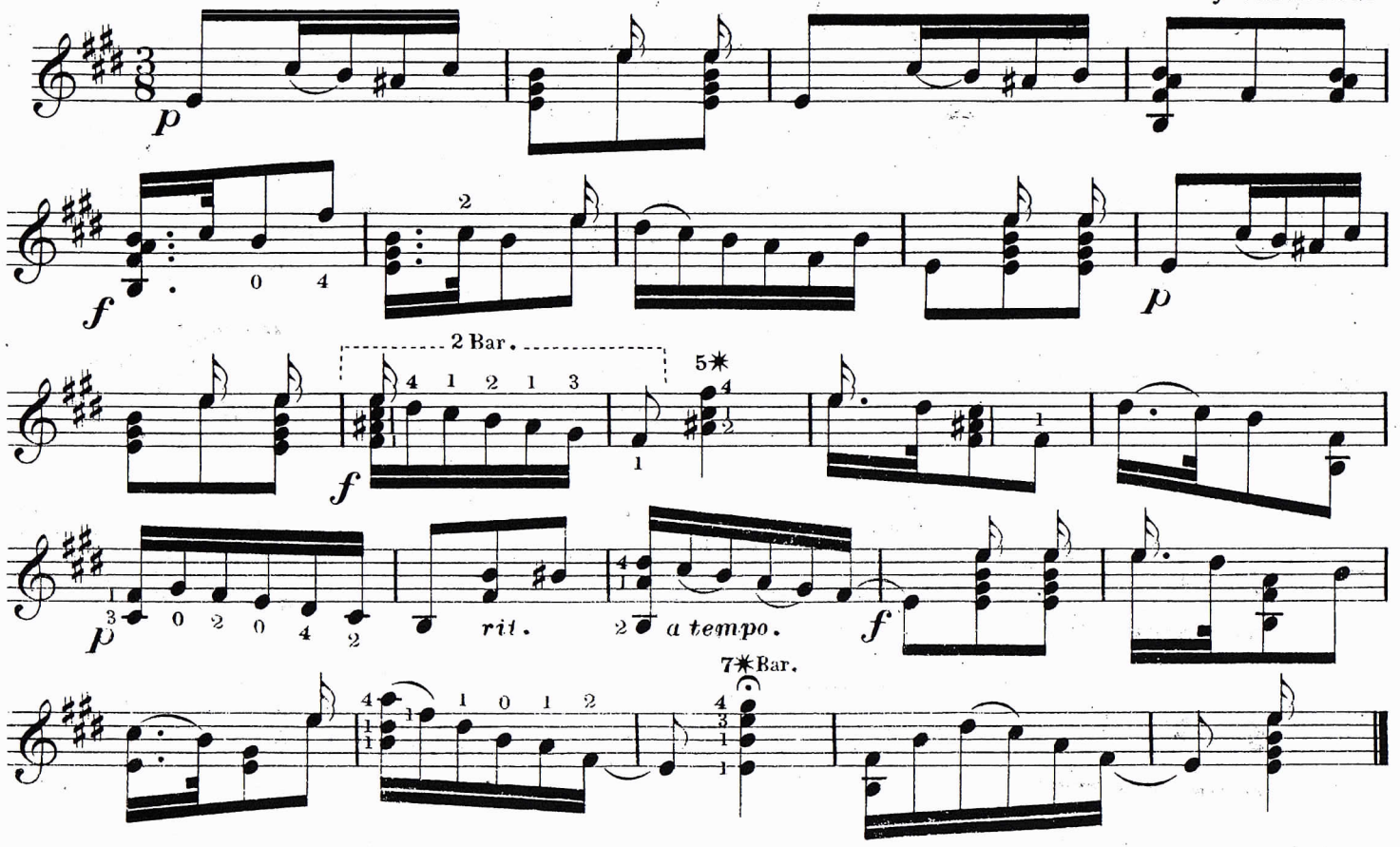


HELTER SKELTER GALOP. Concluded.



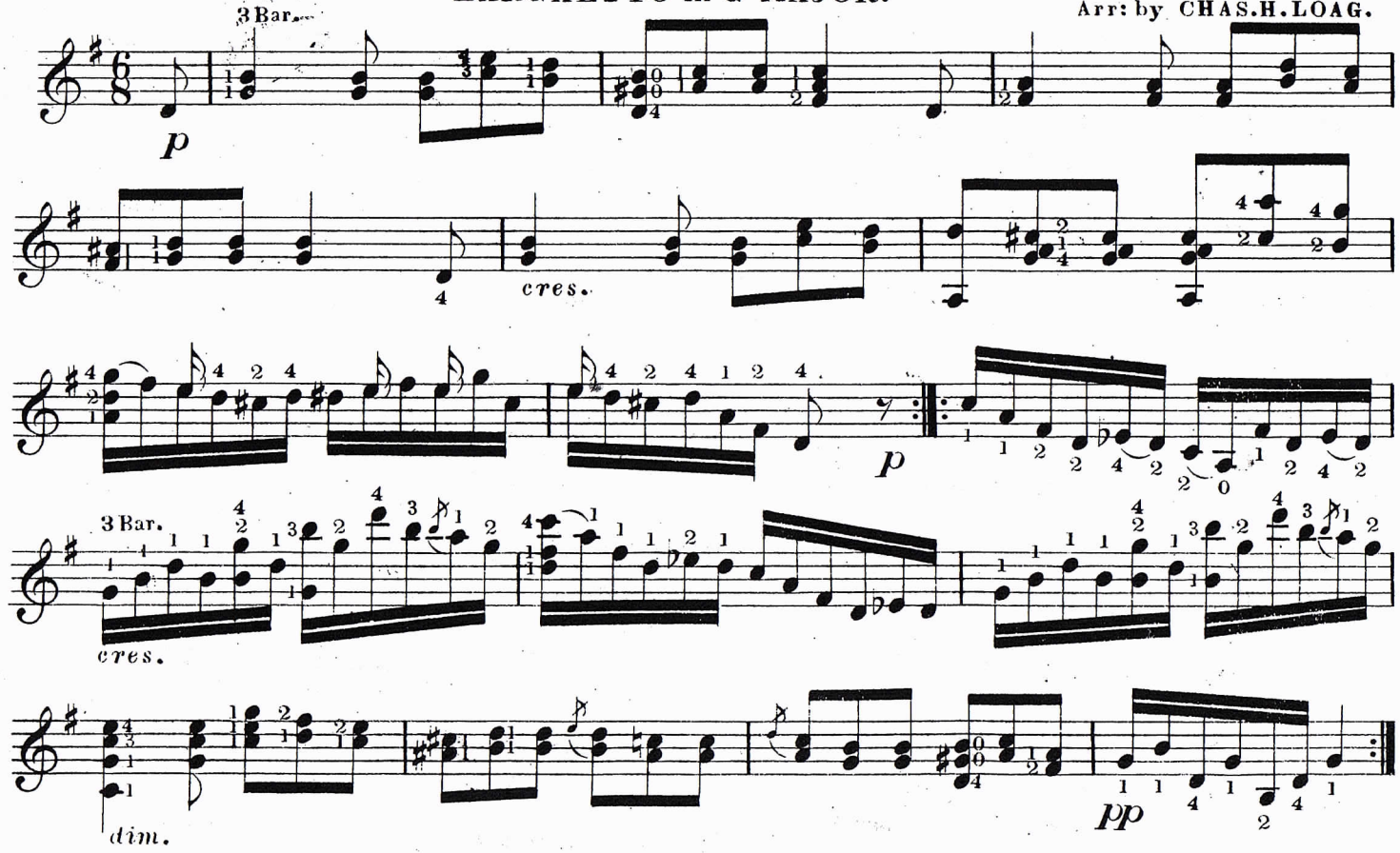
LA BAYADERE WALTZ.

Arr: by C.H.LOAG.



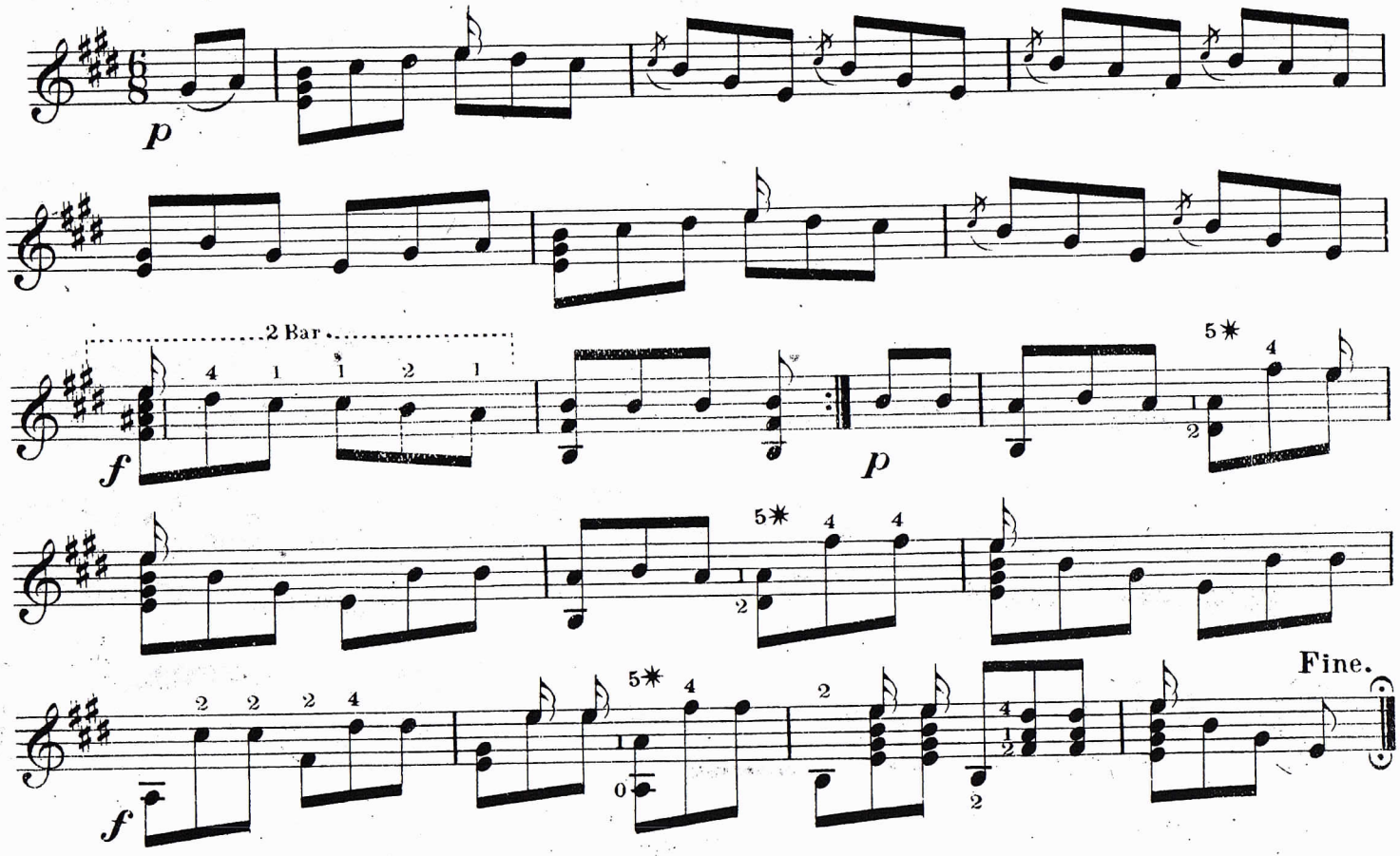
LARGHETTO in G MAJOR.

Arr: by CHAS.H.LOAG.

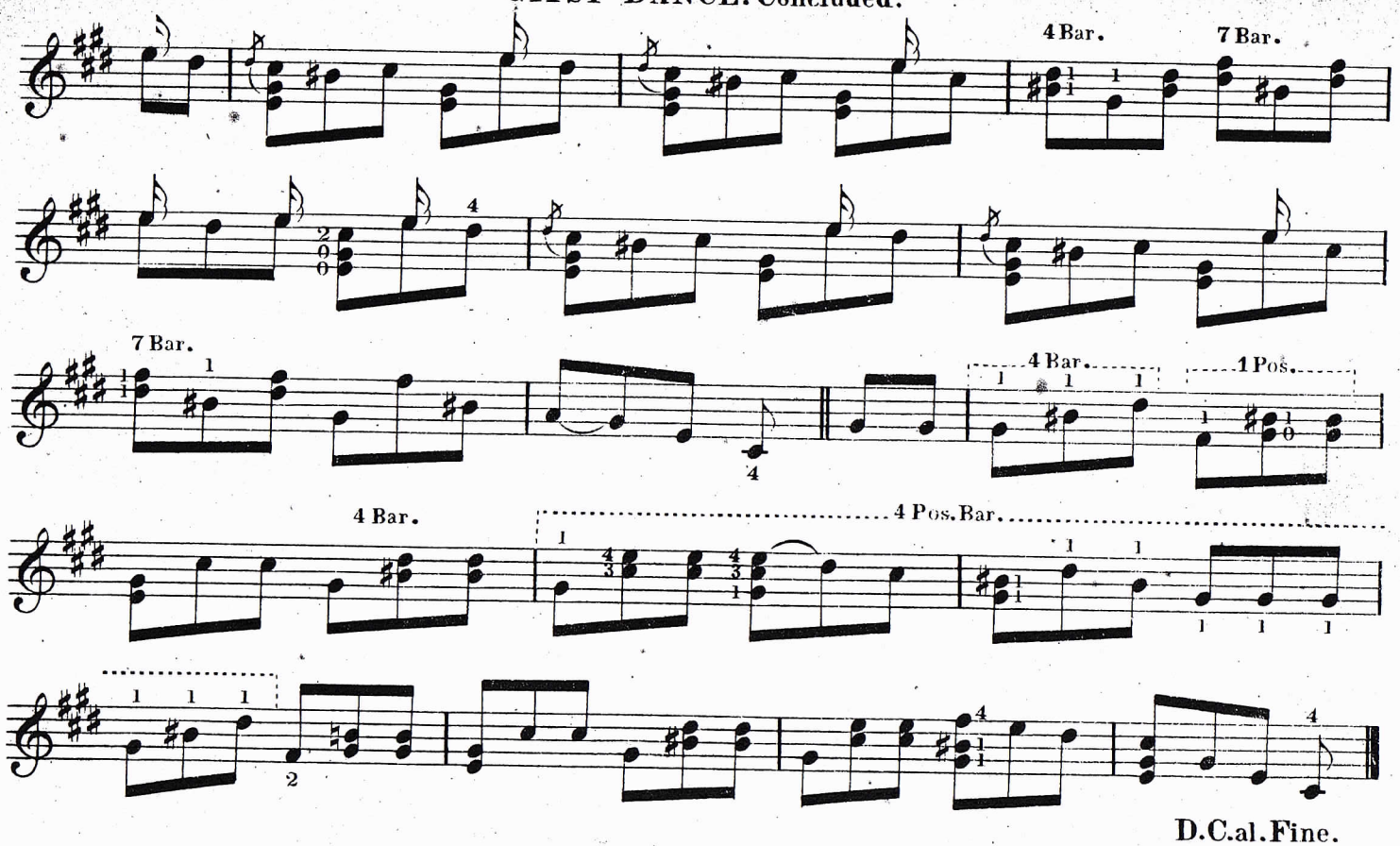


GIPSY DANCE.

Arr: by C.H.LOAG.



GIPSY DANCE. Concluded.



D.C.al.Fine.